WITHIN THE LAW

BAYARD VEILLER

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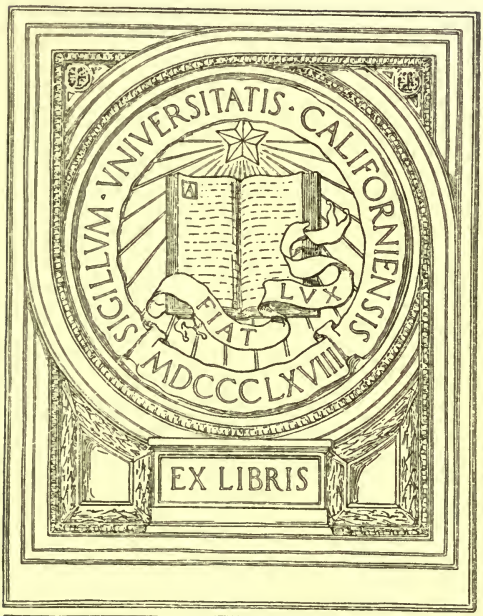

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"THREE YEARS ISN'T FOREVER. WHEN I COME OUT YOU ARE GOING TO PAY FOR EVERY MOMENT OF THEM. THERE WON'T BE A DAY OR AN HOUR THAT I WON'T REMEMBER THAT AT LAST IT WAS YOUR WORD THAT SENT ME TO PRISON."

WITHIN THE LAW

BY

MARVIN DANA

FROM THE PLAY OF

BAYARD VEILLER

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK

GROSSET & DUNLAP

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"Three years isn't forever. When I come out you are going to pay for every moment of them. There won't be a day or an hour that I won't remember that, at last, it was your word that sent me to prison"..... *Frontispiece*

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"I'll never forgive myself, . . . never," she moaned. "Oh, yes, you will," Mary said. "People forgive themselves pretty easily"... 147

"Mary, haven't you ever wanted the things that other women have, . . . shelter, and care, and the big things of life, the things worth while? They're all ready for you now, Mary"..... 243

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UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

Within the Law

CHAPTER I.

THE PANEL OF LIGHT

The lids of the girl's eyes lifted slowly, and she stared at the panel of light in the wall. Just at the outset, the act of seeing made not the least impression on her numbed brain. For a long time she continued to regard the dim illumination in the wall with the same passive fixity of gaze. Apathy still lay upon her crushed spirit. In a vague way, she realized her own inertness, and rested in it gratefully, subtly fearful lest she again arouse to the full horror of her plight. In a curious subconscious fashion, she was striving to hold on to this deadness of sensation, thus to win a little respite from the torture that had exhausted her soul.

Of a sudden, her eyes noted the black lines that lay across the panel of light. And, in that instant, her spirit was quickened once again. The clouds lifted from her brain. Vision was clear now. Understanding seized the full import of this hideous thing on which she looked. . . . For the panel of light was a window, set high within a wall of stone. The rigid lines of black that crossed it were bars—prison bars. It was still true, then: She was in a cell of the Tombs.

The girl, crouching miserably on the narrow bed, maintained her fixed watching of the window—that window which was a symbol of her utter despair. Again, agony wrenched within her. She did not weep: long ago she had exhausted the relief of tears. She did not pace to and fro in the comfort of physical movement with which the caged beast finds a mocking imitation of liberty: long ago, her physical vigors had been drained under stress of anguish. Now, she was well-nigh incapable of any bodily activity. There came not even so much as the feeblest moan from her lips. The torment was far too racking for such futile fashion of lamentation. She merely sat there in a posture of collapse. To all outward seeming, nerveless, emotionless, an abject creature. Even the eyes, which held so fixedly their gaze on the window, were quite expressionless. Over them lay a film, like that which veils the eyes of some dead thing. Only an occasional languid motion of the lids revealed the life that remained.

So still the body. Within the soul, fury raged uncontrolled. For all the desolate calm of outer seeming, the tragedy of her fate was being acted with frightful vividness there in memory. In that dreadful remembrance, her spirit was rent asunder anew by realization of that which had become her portion. . . . It was then, as once again the horrible injustice of her fate racked consciousness with its tortures, that the seeds of revolt were implanted in her heart. The thought of revenge gave to her the first meager gleam of comfort that had lightened her moods through many miserable

days and nights. Those seeds of revolt were to be nourished well, were to grow into their flower—a poison flower, developed through the three years of convict life to which the judge had sentenced her.

The girl was appalled by the mercilessness of a destiny that had so outraged right. She was wholly innocent of having done any wrong. She had struggled through years of privation to keep herself clean and wholesome, worthy of those gentlefolk from whom she drew her blood. And earnest effort had ended at last under an overwhelming accusation—false, yet none the less fatal to her. This accusation, after soul-wearying delays, had culminated to-day in conviction. The sentence of the court had been imposed upon her: that for three years she should be imprisoned. . . . This, despite her innocence. She had endured much—miserably much!—for honesty's sake. There wrought the irony of fate. She had endured bravely for honesty's sake. And the end of it all was shame unutterable. There was nought left her save a wild dream of revenge against the world that had martyrized her. "Vengeance is mine. I will repay, saith the Lord." . . . The admonition could not touch her now. Why should she care for the decrees of a God who had abandoned her!

There had been nothing in the life of Mary Turner, before the catastrophe came, to distinguish it from many another. Its most significant details were of a sordid kind, familiar to poverty. Her father had been an unsuccessful man, as success is esteemed by this generation of Mammon-worshipers. He was a gentleman,

but the trivial fact is of small avail to-day. He was of good birth, and he was the possessor of an inherited competence. He had, as well, intelligence, but it was not of a financial sort.

So, little by little, his fortune became shrunken toward nothingness, by reason of injudicious investments. He married a charming woman, who, after a brief period of wedded happiness, gave her life to the birth of the single child of the union, Mary. Afterward, in his distress over this loss, Ray Turner seemed even more incompetent for the management of business affairs. As the years passed, the daughter grew toward maturity in an experience of ever-increasing penury. Nevertheless, there was no actual want of the necessities of life, though always a woful lack of its elegancies. The girl was in the high-school, when her father finally gave over his rather feeble effort of living. Between parent and child, the intimacy had been unusually close. At his death, the father left her a character well instructed in the excellent principles that had been his own. That was his sole legacy to her. Of worldly goods, not the value of a pin.

Yet, measured according to the stern standards of adversity, Mary was fortunate. Almost at once, she procured a humble employment in the Emporium, the great department store owned by Edward Gilder. To be sure, the wage was infinitesimal, while the toil was body-breaking, soul-breaking. Still, the pittance could be made to sustain life, and Mary was blessed with both soul and body to sustain much. So she merged herself

in the army of workers—in the vast battalion of those that give their entire selves to a labor most stern and unremitting, and most ill rewarded.

Mary, nevertheless, avoided the worst perils of her lot. She did not flinch under privation, but went her way through it, if not serenely, at least without ever a thought of yielding to those temptations that beset a girl who is at once poor and charming. Fortunately for her, those in closest authority over her were not so deeply smitten as to make obligatory on her a choice between complaisance and loss of position. She knew of situations like that, the *cul-de-sac* of chastity, worse than any devised by a Javert. In the store, such things were matters of course. There is little innocence for the girl in the modern city. There can be none for the worker thrown into the storm-center of a great commercial activity, humming with vicious gossip, all alive with quips from the worldly wise. At the very outset of her employment, the sixteen-year-old girl learned that she might eke out the six dollars weekly by trading on her personal attractiveness to those of the opposite sex. The idea was repugnant to her; not only from the maidenly instinct of purity, but also from the moral principles woven into her character by the teachings of a father wise in most things, though a fool in finance. Thus, she remained unsmirched, though well informed as to the verities of life. She preferred purity and penury, rather than a slight pampering of the body to be bought by its degradation. Among her fellows were some like herself; others, unlike. Of her own sort, in

this single particular, were the two girls with whom she shared a cheap room. Their common decency in attitude toward the other sex was the unique bond of union. In their association, she found no real companionship. Nevertheless, they were wholesome enough. Otherwise they were illiterate, altogether uncongenial.

In such wise, through five dreary years, Mary Turner lived. Nine hours daily, she stood behind a counter. She spent her other waking hours in obligatory menial labors: cooking her own scant meals over the gas; washing and ironing, for the sake of that neat appearance which was required of her by those in authority at the Emporium—yet, more especially, necessary for her own self-respect. With a mind keen and earnest, she contrived some solace from reading and studying, since the free library gave her this opportunity. So, though engaged in stultifying occupation through most of her hours, she was able to find food for mental growth. Even, in the last year, she had reached a point of development whereat she began to study seriously her own position in the world's economy, to meditate on a method of bettering it. Under this impulse, hope mounted high in her heart. Ambition was born. By candid comparison of herself with others about her, she realized the fact that she possessed an intelligence beyond the average. The training by her father, too, had been of a superior kind. There was as well, at the back vaguely, the feeling of particular self-respect that belongs inevitably to the possessor of good blood. Finally, she demurely enjoyed a modest appreciation of her own

physical advantages. In short, she had beauty, brains and breeding. Three things of chief importance to any woman—though there be many minds as to which may be chief among the three.

I have said nothing specific thus far as to the outer being of Mary Turner—except as to filmed eyes and a huddled form. But, in a happier situation, the girl were winning enough. Indeed, more! She was one of those that possess an harmonious beauty, with, too, the penetrant charm that springs from the mind, with the added graces born of the spirit. Just now, as she sat, a figure of desolation, there on the bed in the Tombs cell, it would have required a most analytical observer to determine the actualities of her loveliness. Her form was disguised by the droop of exhaustion. Her complexion showed the pallor of sorrowful vigils. Her face was no more than a mask of misery. Yet, the shrewd observer, if a lover of beauty, might have found much for delight, even despite the concealment imposed by her present condition. Thus, the stormy glory of her dark hair, great masses that ran a riot of shining ripples and waves. And the straight line of the nose, not too thin, yet fine enough for the rapture of a Praxiteles. And the pink daintiness of the ear-tips, which peered warmly from beneath the pall of tresses. One could know nothing accurately of the complexion now. But it were easy to guess that in happier places it would show of a purity to entice, with a gentle blooming of roses in the cheeks. Even in this hour of unmitigated evil, the lips revealed a curving beauty of red—not quite

crimson, though near enough for the word; not quite scarlet either; only, a red gently enchanting, which turned one's thoughts toward tenderness—with a hint of desire. It was, too, a generous mouth, not too large; still, happily, not so small as those modeled by Watteau. It was altogether winsome—more, it was generous and true, desirable for kisses—yes!—more desirable for strength and for faith.

Like every intelligent woman, Mary had taken the trouble to reinforce the worth of her physical attractiveness. The instinct of sex was strong in her, as it must be in every normal woman, since that appeal is nature's law. She kept herself supple and svelte by many exercises, at which her companions in the chamber scoffed, with the prudent warning that more work must mean more appetite. With arms still aching from the lifting of heavy bolts of cloth to and fro from the shelves, she nevertheless was at pains nightly to brush with the appointed two hundred strokes the thick masses of her hair. Even here, in the sordid desolation of the cell, the lustrous sheen witnessed the fidelity of her care. So, in each detail of her, the keen observer might have found adequate reason for admiration. There was the delicacy of the hands, with fingers tapering, with nails perfectly shaped, neither too dull nor too shining. And there were, too, finally, the trimly shod feet, set rather primly on the floor, small, and arched like those of a Spanish *Infanta*. In truth, Mary Turner showed the possibilities at least, if not just now the realities, of a very beautiful woman.

Naturally, in this period of grief, the girl's mind had no concern with such external merits over which once she had modestly exulted. All her present energies were set to precise recollection of the ghastly experience into which she had been thrust.

In its outline, the event had been tragically simple.

There had been thefts in the store. They had been traced eventually to a certain department, that in which Mary worked. The detective was alert. Some valuable silks were missed. Search followed immediately. The goods were found in Mary's locker. That was enough. She was charged with the theft. She protested innocence—only to be laughed at in derision by her accusers. Every thief declares innocence. Mr. Gilder himself was emphatic against her. The thieving had been long continued. An example must be made. The girl was arrested.

The crowded condition of the court calendar kept her for three months in the Tombs, awaiting trial. She was quite friendless. To the world, she was only a thief in duress. At the last, the trial was very short. Her lawyer was merely an unfledged practitioner assigned to her defense as a formality of the court. This novice in his profession was so grateful for the first recognition ever afforded him that he rather assisted than otherwise the District Attorney in the prosecution of the case.

At the end, twelve good men and true rendered a verdict of guilty against the shuddering girl in the prisoner's dock.

So simple the history of Mary Turner's trial. . . . The sentence of the judge was lenient—only three years!

CHAPTER II.

A CHEERFUL PRODIGAL.

That which was the supreme tragedy to the broken girl in the cell merely afforded rather agreeable entertainment to her former fellows of the department store. Mary Turner throughout her term of service there had been without real intimates, so that now none was ready to mourn over her fate. Even the two room-mates had felt some slight offense, since they sensed the superiority of her, though vaguely. Now, they found a smug satisfaction in the fact of her disaster as emphasizing very pleasurably their own continuance in respectability.

As many a philosopher has observed, we secretly enjoy the misfortunes of others, particularly of our friends, since they are closest to us. Most persons hasten to deny this truth in its application to themselves. They do so either because from lack of clear understanding they are not quite honest with themselves, from lack of clear introspection, or because, as may be more easily believed, they are not quite honest in the assertion. As a matter of fact, we do find a singular satisfaction in the troubles of others. Contemplation of such suffering renders more striking the contrasted well-being of our own lot. We need the pains of others to serve as background for our joys—just as sin is essen-

tial as the background for any appreciation of virtue, even any knowledge of its existence. . . . So now, on the day of Mary Turner's trial, there was a subtle gaiety of gossipings to and fro through the store. The girl's plight was like a shuttlecock driven hither and yon by the battledores of many tongues. It was the first time in many years that one of the employees had been thus accused of theft. Shoplifters were so common as to be a stale topic. There was a refreshing novelty in this case, where one of themselves was the culprit. Her fellow workers chatted desultorily of her as they had opportunity, and complacently thanked their gods that they were not as she—with reason. Perhaps, a very few were kindly hearted enough to feel a touch of sympathy for this ruin of a life.

Of such was Smithson, a member of the executive staff, who did not hesitate to speak his mind, though none too forcibly. As for that, Smithson, while the possessor of a dignity nourished by years of floor-walking, was not given to the holding of vigorous opinions. Yet, his comment, meager as it was, stood wholly in Mary's favor. And he spoke with a certain authority, since he had given official attention to the girl.

Smithson stopped Sarah Edwards, Mr. Gilder's private secretary, as she was passing through one of the departments that morning, to ask her if the owner had yet reached his office.

"Been and gone," was the secretary's answer, with the terseness characteristic of her.

"Gone!" Smithson repeated, evidently somewhat dis-

turbed by the information. "I particularly wanted to see him."

"He'll be back, all right," Sarah vouchsafed, amiably. "He went down-town, to the Court of General Sessions. The judge sent for him about the Mary Turner case."

"Oh, yes, I remember now," Smithson exclaimed. Then he added, with a trace of genuine feeling, "I hope the poor girl gets off. She was a nice girl—quite the lady, you know, Miss Edwards."

"No, I don't know," Sarah rejoined, a bit tartly. Truth to tell, the secretary was haunted by a grim suspicion that she herself was not quite the lady of her dreams, and never would be able to acquire the graces of the Vere De Vere. For Sarah, while a most efficient secretary, was not in her person of that slender elegance which always characterized her favorite heroines in the novels she affected. On the contrary, she was of a sort to have gratified Byron, who declared that a woman in her maturity should be plump. Now, she recalled with a twinge of envy that the accused girl had been of an aristocratic slimness of form. "Oh, did you know her?" she questioned, without any real interest.

Smithson answered with that bland stateliness of manner which was the fruit of floor-walking politeness.

"Well, I couldn't exactly say I knew her, and yet I might say, after a manner of speaking, that I did—to a certain extent. You see, they put her in my department when she first came here to work. She was a good saleswoman, as saleswomen go. For the matter of

that," he added with a sudden access of energy, "she was the last girl in the world I'd take for a thief." He displayed some evidences of embarrassment over the honest feeling into which he had been betrayed, and made haste to recover his usual business manner, as he continued formally. "Will you please let me know when Mr. Gilder arrives? There are one or two little matters I wish to discuss with him."

"All right!" Sarah agreed briskly, and she hurried on toward the private office.

The secretary was barely seated at her desk when the violent opening of the door startled her, and, as she looked up, a cheery voice cried out:

"Hello, Dad!"

At the same moment, a young man entered, with an air of care-free assurance, his face radiant. But, as his glance went to the empty arm-chair at the desk, he halted abruptly, and his expression changed to one of disappointment.

"Not here!" he grumbled. Then, once again the smile was on his lips as his eyes fell on the secretary, who had now risen to her feet in a flutter of excitement.

"Why, Mr. Dick!" Sarah gasped.

"Hello, Sadie!" came the genial salutation. The young man advanced and shook hands with her warmly. "I'm home again. Where's Dad?"

Even as he asked the question, the quick sobering of his face bore witness to his disappointment over not finding his father in the office. For such was the relationship of the owner of the department store to this

new arrival on the scene. And in the patent chagrin under which the son now labored was to be found a certain indication of character not to be disregarded. Unlike many a child, he really loved his father. The death of the mother years before had left him without other opportunity for affection in the home, since he had neither brother nor sister. He loved his father with a depth of feeling that made between the two a real *camaraderie,* despite great differences in temperament. In that simple and sincere regard which he bore for his father, the boy revealed a heart ready for love, willing to give of itself its best for the one beloved. Beyond that, as yet, there was little to be said of him with exactness. He was a spoiled child of fortune, if you wish to have it so. Certainly, he was only a drone in the world's hive. Thus far, he had enjoyed the good things of life, without ever doing aught to deserve them by contributing in return—save by his smiles and his genial air of happiness.

In the twenty-three years of his life, every gift that money could lavish had been his. If the sum total of benefit was small, at least there remained the consoling fact that the harm was even less. Luxury had not sapped the strength of him. He had not grown vicious, as have so many of his fellows among the sons of the rich. Some instinct held him aloof from the grosser vices. His were the trifling faults that had their origin chiefly in the joy of life, which manifest occasionally in riotous extravagancies, of a sort actually to harm none, however absurd and useless they may be.

So much one might see by a glance into the face. He was well groomed, of course; healthy, all a-tingle with vitality. And in the clear eyes, which avoided no man's gaze, nor sought any woman's unseemly, there showed a soul untainted, not yet developed, not yet debased. Through all his days, Dick Gilder had walked gladly, in the content that springs to the call of one possessed of a capacity for enjoyment; possessed, too, of every means for the gratification of desire. As yet, the man of him was unrevealed in its integrity. No test had been put upon him. The fires of suffering had not tried the dross of him. What real worth might lie under this sunny surface the future must determine. There showed now only this one significant fact: that, in the first moment of his return from journeyings abroad, he sought his father with all eagerness, and was sorely grieved because the meeting must still be delayed. It was a little thing, perhaps. Yet, it was capable of meaning much concerning the nature of the lad. It revealed surely a tender heart, one responsive to a pure love. And to one of his class, there are many forces ever present to atrophy such simple, wholesome power of loving. The ability to love cleanly and absolutely is the supreme virtue.

Sarah explained that Mr. Gilder had been called to the Court of General Sessions by the judge.

Dick interrupted her with a gust of laughter.

"What's Dad been doing now?" he demanded, his eyes twinkling. Then, a reminiscent grin shaped itself on his lips. "Remember the time that fresh cop ar-

rested him for speeding? Wasn't he wild? I thought he would have the whole police force discharged." He smiled again. "The trouble is," he declared sedately, "that sort of thing requires practise. Now, when I'm arrested for speeding, I'm not in the least flustered—oh, not a little bit! But poor Dad! That one experience of his almost soured his whole life. It was near the death of him—also, of the city's finest."

By this time, the secretary had regained her usual poise, which had been somewhat disturbed by the irruption of the young man. Her round face shone delightedly as she regarded him. There was a maternal note of rebuke in her voice as she spoke:

"Why, we didn't expect you back for two or three months yet."

Once again, Dick laughed, with an infectious gaiety that brought a smile of response to the secretary's lips.

"Sadie," he explained confidentially, "don't you dare ever to let the old man know. He would be all swollen up. It's bad to let a parent swell up. But the truth is, Sadie, I got kind of homesick for Dad—yes, just that!" He spoke the words with a sort of shamefaced wonder. It is not easy for an Anglo-Saxon to confess the realities of affection in vital intimacies. He repeated the phrase in a curiously appreciative hesitation, as one astounded by his own emotion. "Yes, homesick for Dad!"

Then, to cover an excess of sincere feeling, he continued, with a burst of laughter:

"Besides, Sadie, I was broke."

The secretary sniffed.

"The cable would have handled that end of it, I guess," she said, succinctly.

There was no word of contradiction from Dick, who, from ample experience, knew that any demand for funds would have received answer from the father.

"But what is Dad doing in court?" he demanded.

Sarah explained the matter with her usual conciseness:

"One of the girls was arrested for stealing."

The nature of the son was shown then clearly in one of its best aspects. At once, he exhibited his instinct toward the quality of mercy, and, too, his trust in the father whom he loved, by his eager comment.

"And Dad went to court to get her out of the scrape. That's just like the old man!"

Sarah, however, showed no hint of enthusiasm. Her mind was ever of the prosaic sort, little prone to flights. In that prosaic quality was to be found the explanation of her dependability as a private secretary. So, now, she merely made a terse statement.

"She was tried to-day, and convicted. The judge sent for Mr. Gilder to come down this morning and have a talk with him about the sentence."

There was no lessening of the expression of certainty on the young man's face. He loved his father, and he trusted where he loved.

"It will be all right," he declared, in a tone of entire conviction. "Dad's heart is as big as a barrel. He'll get her off."

Then, of a sudden, Dick gave a violent start. He added a convincing groan.

"Oh, Lord!" he exclaimed, dismally. There was shame in his voice. "I forgot all about it!"

The secretary regarded him with an expression of amazement.

"All about what?" she questioned.

Dick assumed an air vastly more confidential than at any time hitherto. He leaned toward the secretary's desk, and spoke with a new seriousness of manner:

"Sadie, have you any money? I'm broke! My taxi' has been waiting outside all this time."

"Why, yes," the secretary said, cheerfully. "If you will——"

Dick was discreet enough to turn his attention to a picture on the wall opposite while Sarah went through those acrobatic performances obligatory on women who take no chances of losing money by carrying it in purses.

"There!" she called after a few panting seconds, and exhibited a flushed face.

Dick turned eagerly and seized the banknote offered him.

"Mighty much obliged, Sadie," he said, enthusiastically. "But I must run. Otherwise, this wouldn't be enough for the fare!" And, so saying, he darted out of the room.

CHAPTER III.

ONLY THREE YEARS.

When, at last, the owner of the store entered the office, his face showed extreme irritation. He did not vouchsafe any greeting to the secretary, who regarded him with an accurate perception of his mood. With a diplomacy born of long experience, in her first speech Sarah afforded an agreeable diversion to her employer's line of thought.

"Mr. Hastings, of the Empire store, called you up, Mr. Gilder, and asked me to let him know when you returned. Shall I get him on the wire?"

The man's face lightened instantly, and there was even the beginning of a smile on his lips as he seated himself at the great mahogany desk.

"Yes, yes!" he exclaimed, with evident enthusiasm. The smile grew in the short interval before the connection was made. When, finally, he addressed his friend over the telephone, his tones were of the cheerfulest.

"Oh, good morning. Yes, certainly. Four will suit me admirably. . . . Sunday? Yes, if you like. We can go out after church, and have luncheon at the country club." After listening a moment, he laughed in a pleased fashion that had in it a suggestion of conscious superiority. "My dear fellow," he declared briskly,

"you couldn't beat me in a thousand years. Why, I made the eighteen holes in ninety-two only last week." He laughed again at the answer over the wire, then hung up the receiver and pushed the telephone aside, as he turned his attention to the papers neatly arranged on the desk ready to his hand.

The curiosity of the secretary could not be longer delayed.

'What did they do with the Turner girl?" she inquired in an elaborately casual manner.

Gilder did not look up from the heap of papers, but answered rather harshly, while once again his expression grew forbidding.

"I don't know—I couldn't wait," he said. He made a petulant gesture as he went on: "I don't see why Judge Lawlor bothered me about the matter. He is the one to impose sentence, not I. I am hours behind with my work now."

For a few minutes he gave himself up to the routine of business, distributing the correspondence and other various papers for the action of subordinates, and speaking his orders occasionally to the attentive secretary with a quickness and precision that proclaimed the capable executive. The observer would have realized at once that here was a man obviously fitted to the control of large affairs. The ability that marches inevitably to success showed unmistakably in the face and form, and in the fashion of speech. Edward Gilder was a big man physically, plainly the possessor of that abundant vital energy which is a prime requisite for achievement in

the ordering of modern business concerns. Force was, indeed, the dominant quality of the man. His tall figure was proportionately broad, and he was heavily fleshed. In fact, the body was too ponderous. Perhaps, in that characteristic might be found a clue to the chief fault in his nature. For he was ponderous, spiritually and mentally, as well as materially. The fact was displayed suggestively in the face, which was too heavy with its prominent jowls and aggressive chin and rather bulbous nose. But there was nothing flabby anywhere. The ample features showed no trace of weakness, only a rude, abounding strength. There was no lighter touch anywhere. Evidently a just man according to his own ideas, yet never one to temper justice with mercy. He appeared, and was, a very practical and most prosaic business man. He was not given to a humorous outlook on life. He took it and himself with the utmost seriousness. He was almost entirely lacking in imagination, that faculty which is essential to sympathy.

"Take this," he directed presently, when he had disposed of the matters before him. Forthwith, he dictated the following letter, and now his voice took on a more unctuous note, as of one who is appreciative of his own excellent generosity.

"THE EDITOR,

"The New York Herald.

"DEAR SIR: Inclosed please find my check for a thousand dollars for your free-ice fund. It is going to be a very hard summer for the poor, and I hope by

thus starting the contributions for your fine charity at this early day that you will be able to accomplish even more good than usually.

"Very truly yours."

He turned an inquiring glance toward Sarah.

"That's what I usually give, isn't it?"

The secretary nodded energetically.

"Yes," she agreed in her brisk manner, "that's what you have given every year for the last ten years."

The statement impressed Gilder pleasantly. His voice was more mellow as he made comment. His heavy face was radiant, and he smiled complacently.

"Ten thousand dollars to this one charity alone!" he exclaimed. "Well, it is pleasant to be able to help those less fortunate than ourselves." He paused, evidently expectant of laudatory corroboration from the secretary.

But Sarah, though she could be tactful enough on occasion, did not choose to meet her employer's anticipations just now. For that matter, her intimate services permitted on her part some degree of familiarity with the august head of the establishment. Besides, she did not stand in awe of Gilder, as did the others in his service. No man is a hero to his valet, or to his secretary. Intimate association is hostile to hero-worship. So, now, Sarah spoke nonchalantly, to the indignation of the philanthropist:

"Oh, yes, sir. Specially when you make so much that you don't miss it."

Gilder's thick gray brows drew down in a frown of

displeasure, while his eyes opened slightly in sheer surprise over the secretary's unexpected remark. He hesitated for only an instant before replying with an air of great dignity, in which was a distinct note of rebuke for the girl's presumption.

"The profits from my store are large, I admit, Sarah. But I neither smuggle my goods, take rebates from railroads, conspire against small competitors, nor do any of the dishonest acts that disgrace other lines of business. So long as I make my profits honestly, I am honestly entitled to them, no matter how big they are."

The secretary, being quite content with the havoc she had wrought in her employer's complacency over his charitableness, nodded, and contented herself with a demure assent to his outburst.

"Yes, sir," she agreed, very meekly.

Gilder stared at her for a few seconds, somewhat indignantly. Then, he bethought himself of a subtle form of rebuke by emphasizing his generosity.

"Have the cashier send my usual five hundred to the Charities Organization Society," he ordered. With this new evidence of his generous virtue, the frown passed from his brows. If, for a fleeting moment, doubt had assailed him under the spur of the secretary's words, that doubt had now vanished under his habitual conviction as to his sterling worth to the world at large.

It was, therefore, with his accustomed blandness of manner that he presently acknowledged the greeting of George Demarest, the chief of the legal staff that looked after the firm's affairs. He was aware without being

told that the lawyer had called to acquaint him with the issue in the trial of Mary Turner.

"Well, Demarest?" he inquired, as the dapper attorney advanced into the room at a rapid pace, and came to a halt facing the desk, after a lively nod in the direction of the secretary.

The lawyer's face sobered, and his tone as he answered was tinged with constraint.

"Judge Lawlor gave her three years," he replied, gravely. It was plain from his manner that he did not altogether approve.

But Gilder was unaffected by the attorney's lack of satisfaction over the result. On the contrary, he smiled exultantly. His oritund voice took on a deeper note, as he turned toward the secretary.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Take this, Sarah." And he continued, as the girl opened her notebook and poised the pencil: "Be sure to have Smithson post a copy of it conspicuously in all the girls' dressing-rooms, and in the reading-room, and in the lunch-rooms, and in the assembly-room." He cleared his throat ostentatiously and proceeded to the dictation of the notice:

"Mary Turner, formerly employed in this store, was to-day sentenced to prison for three years, having been convicted for the theft of goods valued at over four hundred dollars. The management wishes again to draw attention on the part of its employees to the fact that honesty is always the best policy. . . . Got that?"

"Yes, sir." The secretary's voice was mechanical, without any trace of feeling. She was not minded to

disturb her employer a second time this morning by injudicious comment.

"Take it to Smithson," Gilder continued, "and tell him that I wish him to attend to its being posted according to my directions at once."

Again, the girl made her formal response in the affirmative, then left the room.

Gilder brought forth a box of cigars from a drawer of the desk, opened it and thrust it toward the waiting lawyer, who, however, shook his head in refusal, and continued to move about the room rather restlessly. Demarest paid no attention to the other's invitation to a seat, but the courtesy was perfunctory on Gilder's part, and he hardly perceived the perturbation of his caller, for he was occupied in selecting and lighting a cigar with the care of a connoisseur. Finally, he spoke again, and now there was an infinite contentment in the rich voice.

"Three years—three years! That ought to be a warning to the rest of the girls." He looked toward Demarest for acquiescence.

The lawyer's brows were knit as he faced the proprietor of the store.

"Funny thing, this case!" he ejaculated. "In some features, one of the most unusual I have seen since I have been practising law."

The smug contentment abode still on Gilder's face as he puffed in leisurely ease on his cigar and uttered a trite condolence.

"Very sad!—quite so! Very sad case, I call it."

Demarest went on speaking, with a show of feeling:

"Most unusual case, in my estimation. You see, the girl keeps on declaring her innocence. That, of course, is common enough in a way. But here, it's different. The point is, somehow, she makes her protestations more convincing than they usually do. They ring true, as it seems to me."

Gilder smiled tolerantly.

"They didn't ring very true to the jury, it would seem," he retorted. And his voice was tart as he added: "Nor to the judge, since he deemed it his duty to give her three years."

"Some persons are not very sensitive to impressions in such cases, I admit," Demarest returned, coolly. If he meant any subtlety of allusion to his hearer, it failed wholly to pierce the armor of complacency.

"The stolen goods were found in her locker," Gilder declared in a tone of finality. "Some of them, I have been given to understand, were actually in the pocket of her coat."

"Well," the attorney said with a smile, "that sort of thing makes good-enough circumstantial evidence, and without circumstantial evidence there would be few convictions for crime. Yet, as a lawyer, I'm free to admit that circumstantial evidence alone is never quite safe as proof of guilt. Naturally, she says some one else must have put the stolen goods there. As a matter of exact reasoning, that is quite within the measure of possibility. That sort of thing has been done countless times."

Gilder sniffed indignantly.

"And for what reason?" he demanded. "It's too absurd to think about."

"In similar cases," the lawyer answered, "those actually guilty of the thefts have thus sought to throw suspicion on the innocent in order to avoid it on themselves when the pursuit got too hot on their trail. Sometimes, too, such evidence has been manufactured merely to satisfy a spite against the one unjustly accused."

"It's too absurd to think about," Gilder repeated, impatiently. "The judge and the jury found no fault with the evidence."

Demarest realized that this advocacy in behalf of the girl was hardly fitting on the part of the legal representative of the store she was supposed to have robbed, so he abruptly changed his line of argument.

"She says that her record of five years in your employ ought to count something in her favor."

Gilder, however, was not disposed to be sympathetic as to a matter so flagrantly opposed to his interests.

"A court of justice has decreed her guilty," he asserted once again, in his ponderous manner. His emphasis indicated that there the affair ended.

Demarest smiled cynically as he strode to and fro.

"Nowadays," he shot out, "we don't call them courts of justice: we call them courts of law."

Gilder yielded only a rather dubious smile over the quip. This much he felt that he could afford, since those same courts served his personal purposes well indeed.

"Anyway," he declared, becoming genial again, "it's

out of our hands. There's nothing we can do, now."

"Why, as to that," the lawyer replied, with a hint of hesitation, "I am not so sure. You see, the fact of the matter is that, though I helped to prosecute the case, I am not a little bit proud of the verdict."

Gilder raised his eyebrows in unfeigned astonishment. Even yet, he was quite without appreciation of the attorney's feeling in reference to the conduct of the case.

"Why?" he questioned, sharply.

"Because," the lawyer said, again halting directly before the desk, "in spite of all the evidence against her, I am not sure that Mary Turner is guilty—far from it, in fact!"

Gilder uttered an ejaculation of contempt, but Demarest went on resolutely.

"Anyhow," he explained, "the girl wants to see you, and I wish to urge you to grant her an interview."

Gilder flared at this suggestion, and scowled wrathfully on the lawyer, who, perhaps with professional prudence, had turned away in his rapid pacing of the room.

"What's the use?" Gilder stormed. A latent hardness revealed itself at the prospect of such a visitation. And along with this hardness came another singular revelation of the nature of the man. For there was consternation in his voice, as he continued in vehement expostulation against the idea. If there was harshness in his attitude there was, too, a fugitive suggestion of tenderness alarmed over the prospect of undergoing such an interview with a woman.

"I can't have her crying all over the office and begging for mercy," he protested, truculently. But a note of fear lay under the petulance.

Demarest's answer was given with assurance.

"You are mistaken about that. The girl doesn't beg for mercy. In fact, that's the whole point of the matter. She demands justice—strange as that may seem, in a court of law!—and nothing else. The truth is, she's a very unusual girl, a long way beyond the ordinary saleswoman, both in brains and in education."

"The less reason, then, for her being a thief," Gilder grumbled in his heaviest voice.

"And perhaps the less reason for believing her to be a thief," the lawyer retorted, suavely. He paused for a moment, then went on. There was a tone of sincere determination in his voice. "Just before the judge imposed sentence, he asked her if she had anything to say. You know, it's just a usual form—a thing that rarely means much of anything. But this case was different, let me tell you. She surprised us all by answering at once that she had. It's really a pity, Gilder, that you didn't wait. Why, that poor girl made a—damn—fine speech!"

The lawyer's forensic aspirations showed in his honest appreciation of the effectiveness of such oratory from the heart as he had heard in the courtroom that day.

"Pooh! pooh!" came the querulous objection. "She seems to have hypnotized you." Then, as a new thought came to the magnate, he spoke with a trace of anxiety.

There were always the reporters, looking for space to fill with foolish vaporings.

"Did she say anything against me, or the store?"

"Not a word," the lawyer replied, gravely. His smile of appreciation was discreetly secret. "She merely told us how her father died when she was sixteen years old. She was compelled after that to earn her own living. Then she told how she had worked for you for five years steadily, without there ever being a single thing against her. She said, too, that she had never seen the things found in her locker. And she said more than that! She asked the judge if he himself understood what it means for a girl to be sentenced to prison for something she hadn't done. Somehow, Gilder, the way she talked had its effect on everybody in the courtroom. I know! It's my business to understand things like that. And what she said rang true. What she said, and the way she said it, take brains and courage. The ordinary crook has neither. So, I had a suspicion that she might be speaking the truth. You see, Gilder, it all rang true! And it's my business to know how things ring in that way." There was a little pause, while the lawyer moved back and forth nervously. Then, he added: "I believe Lawlor would have suspended sentence if it hadn't been for your talk with him."

There were not wanting signs that Gilder was impressed. But the gentler fibers of the man were atrophied by the habits of a lifetime. What heart he had once possessed had been buried in the grave of his young wife, to be resurrected only for his son. In most

things, he was consistently a hard man. Since he had no imagination, he could have no real sympathy.

He whirled about in his swivel chair, and blew a cloud of smoke from his mouth. When he spoke, his voice was deeply resonant.

"I simply did my duty," he said. "You are aware that I did not seek any consultation with Judge Lawlor. He sent for me, and asked me what I thought about the case—whether I thought it would be right to let the girl go on a suspended sentence. I told him frankly that I believed that an example should be made of her, for the sake of others who might be tempted to steal. Property has some rights, Demarest, although it seems to be getting nowadays so that anybody is likely to deny it." Then the fretful, half-alarmed note sounded in his voice again, as he continued: "I can't understand why the girl wants to see me."

The lawyer smiled dryly, since he had his back turned at the moment.

"Why," he vouchsafed, "she just said that, if you would see her for ten minutes, she would tell you how to stop the thefts in this store."

Gilder displayed signs of triumph. He brought his chair to a level and pounded the desk with a weighty fist.

"There!" he cried. "I knew it. The girl wants to confess. Well, it's the first sign of decent feeling she's shown. I suppose it ought to be encouraged. Probably there have been others mixed up in this."

Demarest attempted no denial.

"Perhaps," he admitted, though he spoke altogether without conviction. "But," he continued insinuatingly, "at least it can do no harm if you see her. I thought you would be willing, so I spoke to the District Attorney, and he has given orders to bring her here for a few minutes on the way to the Grand Central Station. They're taking her up to Burnsing, you know. I wish, Gilder, you would have a little talk with her. No harm in that!" With the saying, the lawyer abruptly went out of the office, leaving the owner of the store fuming.

CHAPTER IV.

KISSES AND KLEPTOMANIA.

"Hello, Dad!"

After the attorney's departure, Gilder had been rather fussily going over some of the papers on his desk. He was experiencing a vague feeling of injury on account of the lawyer's ill-veiled efforts to arouse his sympathy in behalf of the accused girl. In the instinct of strengthening himself against the possibility of yielding to what he deemed weakness, the magnate rehearsed the facts that justified his intolerance, and, indeed, soon came to gloating over the admirable manner in which righteousness thrives in the world. And it was then that an interruption came in the utterance of two words, words of affection, of love, cried out in the one voice he most longed to hear—for the voice was that of his son. Yet, he did not look up. The thing was altogether impossible! The boy was philandering, junketing, somewhere on the Riviera. His first intimation as to the exact place would come in the form of a cable asking for money. Somehow, his feelings had been unduly stirred that morning; he had grown sentimental, dreaming of pleasant things. . . . All this in a second. Then, he looked up. Why, it was true! It was Dick's face there, smiling in the doorway. Yes, it was Dick, it was Dick

himself! Gilder sprang to his feet, his face suddenly grown younger, radiant.

"Dick!" The big voice was softened to exquisite tenderness.

As the eyes of the two met, the boy rushed forward, and in the next moment the hands of father and son clasped firmly. They were silent in the first emotion of their greeting. Presently, Gilder spoke, with an effort toward harshness in his voice to mask how much he was shaken. But the tones rang more kindly than any he had used for many a day, tremulous with affection.

"What brought you back?" he demanded.

Dick, too, had felt the tension of an emotion far beyond that of the usual things. He was forced to clear his throat before he answered with that assumption of nonchalance which he regarded as befitting the occasion.

"Why, I just wanted to come back home," he said, lightly. A sudden recollection came to give him poise in this time of emotional disturbance, and he added hastily: "And, for the love of heaven, give Sadie five dollars. I borrowed it from her to pay the taxi'. You see, Dad, I'm broke."

"Of course!" With the saying, Edward Gilder roared Gargantuan laughter. In the burst of merriment, his pent feelings found their vent. He was still chuckling when he spoke, sage from much experience of ocean travel. "Poker on the ship, I suppose."

The young man, too, smiled reminiscently as he answered:

"No, not that, though I did have a little run in at

Monte Carlo. But it was the ship that finished me, at that. You see, Dad, they hired Captain Kidd and a bunch of pirates as stewards, and what they did to little Richard was something fierce. And yet, that wasn't the real trouble, either. The fact is, I just naturally went broke. Not a hard thing to do on the other side."

"Nor on this," the father interjected, dryly.

"Anyhow, it doesn't matter much," Dick replied, quite unabashed. "Tell me, Dad, how goes it?"

Gilder settled himself again in his chair, and gazed benignantly on his son.

"Pretty well," he said contentedly; "pretty well, son. I'm glad to see you home again, my boy." There was a great tenderness in the usually rather cold gray eyes.

The young man answered promptly, with delight in his manner of speech, and a sincerity that revealed the underlying merit of his nature.

"And I'm glad to be home, Dad, to be"—there was again that clearing of the throat, but he finished bravely—"with you."

The father avoided a threatening display of emotion by an abrupt change of subject to the trite.

"Have a good time?" he inquired casually, while fumbling with the papers on the desk.

Dick's face broke in a smile of reminiscent happiness.

"The time of my young life!" He paused, and the smile broadened. There was a mighty enthusiasm in his voice as he continued: "I tell you, Dad, it's a fact

that I did almost break the bank at Monte Carlo. I'd have done it sure, if only my money had held out."

"It seems to me that I've heard something of the sort before," was Gilder's caustic comment. But his smile was still wholly sympathetic. He took a curious vicarious delight in the escapades of his son, probably because he himself had committed no follies in his callow days. "Why didn't you cable me?" he asked, puzzled at such restraint on the part of his son.

Dick answered with simple sincerity.

"Because it gave me a capital excuse for coming home."

It was Sarah who afforded a diversion. She had known Dick while he was yet a child, had bought him candy, had felt toward him a maternal liking that increased rather than diminished as he grew to manhood. Now, her face lighted at sight of him, and she smiled a welcome.

"I see you have found him," she said, with a ripple of laughter.

Dick welcomed this interruption of the graver mood.

"Sadie," he said, with a manner of the utmost seriousness, "you are looking finer than ever. And how thin you have grown!"

The girl, eager with fond fancies toward the slender ideal, accepted the compliment literally.

"Oh, Mr. Dick!" she exclaimed, rapturously. "How much do you think I have lost?"

The whimsical heir of the house of Gilder surveyed his victim critically, then spoke with judicial solemnity.

"About two ounces, Sadie."

There came a look of deep hurt on Sadie's face at the flippant jest, which Dick himself was quick to note.

He had not guessed she was thus acutely sensitive concerning her plumpness. Instantly, he was all contrition over his unwitting offense inflicted on her womanly vanity.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Sadie," he exclaimed penitently. "Please don't be really angry with me. Of course, I didn't mean——"

"To twit on facts!" the secretary interrupted, bitterly.

"Pooh!" Dick cried, craftily. "You aren't plump enough to be sensitive about it. Why, you're just right." There was something very boyish about his manner, as he caught at the girl's arm. A memory of the days when she had cuddled him caused him to speak warmly, forgetting the presence of his father. "Now, don't be angry, Sadie. Just give me a little kiss, as you used to do." He swept her into his arms, and his lips met hers in a hearty caress. "There!" he cried. "Just to show there's no ill feeling."

The girl was completely mollified, though in much embarrassment.

"Why, Mr. Dick!" she stammered, in confusion. "Why, Mr. Dick!"

Gilder, who had watched the scene in great astonishment, now interposed to end it.

"Stop, Dick!" he commanded, crisply. "You are

actually making Sarah blush. I think that's about enough, son."

But a sudden unaccustomed gust of affection swirled in the breast of the lad. Plain Anglo-Saxon as he was, with all that implies as to the avoidance of displays of emotion, nevertheless he had been for a long time in lands far from home, where the habits of impulsive and affectionate peoples were radically unlike our own austerer forms. So now, under the spur of an impulse suggested by the dalliance with the buxom secretary, he grinned widely and went to his father.

"A little kiss never hurts any one," he declared, blithely. Then he added vivaciously: "Here, I'll show you!"

With the words, he clasped his arms around his father's neck, and, before that amazed gentleman could understand his purpose, he had kissed soundly first the one cheek and then the other, each with a hearty, wholesome smack of filial piety. This done, he stood back, still beaming happily, while the astounded Sarah tittered bewilderedly. For his own part, Dick was quite unashamed. He loved his father. For once, he had expressed that fondness in a primitive fashion, and he was glad.

The older man withdrew a step, and there rested motionless, under the sway of an emotion akin to dismay. He stood staring intently at his son with a perplexity in his expression that was almost ludicrous. When, at last, he spoke, his voice was a rumble of strangely shy pleasure.

"God bless my soul!" he exclaimed, violently. Then

he raised a hand, and rubbed first one cheek, and after it its fellow, with a gentleness that was significant. The feeling provoked by the embrace showed plainly in his next words. "Why, that's the first time you have kissed me, Dick, since you were a little boy. God bless my soul!" he repeated. And now there was a note of jubilation.

The son, somewhat disturbed by this emotion he had aroused, nevertheless answered frankly with the expression of his own feeling, as he advanced and laid a hand on his father's shoulder.

"The fact is, Dad," he said quietly, with a smile that was good to see, "I am awfully glad to see you again."

"Are you, son?" the father cried happily. Then, abruptly his manner changed, for he felt himself perilously close to the maudlin in this new yielding to sentimentality. Such kisses of tenderness, however agreeable in themselves, were hardly fitting to one of his dignity. "You clear out of here, boy," he commanded, brusquely. "I'm a working man. But here, wait a minute," he added. He brought forth from a pocket a neat sheaf of banknotes, which he held out. "There's carfare for you," he said with a chuckle. "And now clear out. I'll see you at dinner."

Dick bestowed the money in his pocket, and again turned toward the door.

"You can always get rid of me on the same terms," he remarked slyly. And then the young man gave evidence that he, too, had some of his father's ability in things financial. For, in the doorway he turned with a

final speech, which was uttered in splendid diregard for the packet of money he had just received—perhaps, rather, in a splendid regard for it. "Oh, Dad, please don't forget to give Sadie that five dollars I borrowed from her for the taxi'." And with that impertinent reminder he was gone.

The owner of the store returned to his labors with a new zest, for the meeting with his son had put him in high spirits. Perhaps it might have been better for Mary Turner had she come to him just then, while he was yet in this softened mood. But fate had ordained that other events should restore him to his usual harder self before their interview. The effect was, indeed, presently accomplished by the advent of Smithson into the office. He entered with an expression of discomfiture on his rather vacuous countenance. He walked almost nimbly to the desk and spoke with evident distress, as his employer looked up interrogatively.

"McCracken has detained—er—a—lady, sir," he said, feebly. "She has been searched, and we have found about a hundred dollars worth of laces on her."

"Well?" Gilder demanded, impatiently. Such affairs were too common in the store to make necessary this intrusion of the matter on him. "Why did you come to me about it?" His staff knew just what to do with shoplifters.

At once, Smithson became apologetic, while refusing to retreat.

"I'm very sorry, sir," he said haltingly, "but I thought

it wiser, sir, to—er—to bring the matter to your personal attention."

"Quite unnecessary, Smithson," Gilder returned, with asperity. "You know my views on the subject of property. Tell McCracken to have the thief arrested."

Smithson cleared his throat doubtfully, and in his stress of feeling he even relaxed a trifle that majestical erectness of carriage that had made him so valuable as a floor-walker.

"She's not exactly a—er—a thief," he ventured.

"You are trifling, Smithson," the owner of the store exclaimed, in high exasperation. "Not a thief! And you caught her with a hundred dollars worth of laces that she hadn't bought. Not a thief! What in heaven's name do you call her, then?"

"A kleptomaniac," Smithson explained, retaining his manner of mild insistence. "You see, sir, it's this way. The lady happens to be the wife of J. W. Gaskell, the banker, you know."

Yes, Gilder did know. The mention of the name was like a spell in the effect it wrought on the attitude of the irritated owner of the store. Instantly, his expression changed. While before his features had been set grimly, while his eyes had flashed wrathfully, there was now only annoyance over an event markedly unfortunate.

"How extremely awkward!" he cried; and there was a very real concern in his voice. He regarded Smithson kindly, whereat that rather puling gentleman once again assumed his martial bearing. "You were quite right in coming to me." For a moment he was silent, plunged

in thought. Finally he spoke with the decisiveness characteristic of him. "Of course, there's nothing we can do. Just put the stuff back on the counter, and let her go."

But Smithson had not yet wholly unburdened himself. Instead of immediately leaving the room in pursuance of the succinct instructions given him, he again cleared his throat nervously, and made known a further aggravating factor in the situation.

"She's very angry, Mr. Gilder," he announced, timidly. "She—er—she demands an—er—an apology."

The owner of the store half-rose from his chair, then threw himself back with an exclamation of disgust. He again ejaculated the words with which he had greeted his son's unexpected kisses, but now there was a vast difference in the intonation.

"God bless my soul!" he cried. From his expression, it was clear that a pious aspiration was farthest from his thought. On the contrary! Again, he fell silent, considering the situation which Smithson had presented, and, as he reflected, his frown betrayed the emotion natural enough under the circumstances. At last, however, he mastered his irritation to some degree, and spoke his command briefly. "Well, Smithson, apologize to her. It can't be helped." Then his face lighted with a sardonic amusement. "And, Smithson," he went on with a sort of elephantine playfulness, "I shall take it as a personal favor if you will tactfully advise the lady that the goods at Altman and Stern's are really even finer than ours."

When Smithson had left the office, Gilder turned to his secretary.

"Take this," he directed, and he forthwith dictated the following letter to the husband of the lady who was not a thief, as Smithson had so painstakingly pointed out:

"J. W. GASKELL, ESQ.,

"Central National Bank, New York.

"MY DEAR MR. GASKELL: I feel that I should be doing less than my duty as a man if I did not let you know at once that Mrs. Gaskell is in urgent need of medical attention. She came into our store to-day, and——"

He paused for a moment. "No, put it this way," he said finally:

"We found her wandering about our store to-day in a very nervous condition. In her excitement, she carried away about one hundred dollars' worth of rare laces. Not recognizing her, our store detective detained her for a short time. Fortunately for us all, Mrs. Gaskell was able to explain who she was, and she has just gone to her home. Hoping for Mrs. Gaskell's speedy recovery, and with all good wishes, I am,

"Yours very truly."

Yet, though he had completed the letter, Gilder did not at once take up another detail of his business. Instead, he remained plunged in thought, and now his frown was one of simple bewilderment. A number of

minutes passed before he spoke, and then his words revealed distinctly what had been his train of meditation.

"Sadie," he said in a voice of entire sincerity, "I can't understand theft. It's a thing absolutely beyond my comprehension."

On the heels of this ingenuous declaration, Smithson entered the office, and that excellent gentleman appeared even more perturbed than before.

"What on earth is the matter now?" Gilder spluttered, suspiciously.

"It's Mrs. Gaskell still," Smithson replied in great trepidation. "She wants you personally, Mr. Gilder, to apologize to her. She says that the action taken against her is an outrage, and she is not satisfied with the apologies of all the rest of us. She says you must make one, too, and that the store detective must be discharged for intolerable insolence."

Gilder bounced up from his chair angrily.

"I'll be damned if I'll discharge McCracken," he vociferated, glaring on Smithson, who shrank visibly.

But that mild and meek man had a certain strength of pertinacity. Besides, in this case, he had been having multitudinous troubles of his own, which could be ended only by his employer's placating of the offended kleptomaniac.

"But about the apology, Mr. Gilder," he reminded, speaking very deferentially, yet with insistence.

Business instinct triumphed over the magnate's irritation, and his face cleared.

"Oh, I'll apologize," he said with a wry smile of dis-

comfiture. "I'll make things even up a bit when I get an apology from Gaskell. I shrewdly suspect that that estimable gentleman is going to eat humble pie, of my baking, from his wife's recipe. And his will be an honest apology—which mine won't, not by a damned sight!" With the words, he left the room, in his wake a hugely relieved Smithson.

Alone in the office, Sarah neglected her work for a few minutes to brood over the startling contrast of events that had just forced itself on her attention. She was not a girl given to the analysis of either persons or things, but in this instance the movement of affairs had come close to her, and she was compelled to some depth of feeling by the two aspects of life on which to-day she looked. In the one case, as she knew it, a girl under the urge of poverty had stolen. That thief had been promptly arrested, finally she had been tried, had been convicted, had been sentenced to three years in prison. In the other case, a woman of wealth had stolen. There had been no punishment. A euphemism of kleptomania had been offered and accepted as sufficient excuse for her crime. A polite lie had been written to her husband, a banker of power in the city. To her, the proprietor of the store was even now apologizing in courteous phrases of regret. . . . And Mary Turner had been sentenced to three years in prison. Sadie shook her head in dolorous doubt, as she again bent over the keys of her typewriter. Certainly, some happenings in this world of ours did not seem quite fair.

CHAPTER V.

THE VICTIM OF THE LAW.

It was on this same day that Sarah, on one of her numerous trips through the store in behalf of Gilder, was accosted by a salesgirl, whose name, Helen Morris, she chanced to know. It was in a spot somewhere out of the crowd, so that for the moment the two were practically alone. The salesgirl showed signs of embarrassment as she ventured to lay a detaining hand on Sarah's arm, but she maintained her position, despite the secretary's manner of disapproval.

"What on earth do you want?" Sarah inquired, snappishly.

The salesgirl put her question at once.

"What did they do to Mary Turner?"

"Oh, that!" the secretary exclaimed, with increased impatience over the delay, for she was very busy, as always. "You will all know soon enough."

"Tell me now." The voice of the girl was singularly compelling; there was something vividly impressive about her just now, though her pallid, prematurely mature face and the thin figure in the regulation black dress and white apron showed ordinarily only insignificant. "Tell me now," she repeated, with a monotonous emphasis that somehow moved Sarah to obedience against her will, greatly to her own surprise.

"They sent her to prison for three years," she answered, sharply.

"Three years?" The salesgirl had repeated the words in a tone that was indefinable, yet a tone vehement in its incredulous questioning. "Three years?" she said again, as one refusing to believe.

"Yes," Sarah said, impressed by the girl's earnestness; "three years."

"Good God!" There was no irreverence in the exclamation that broke from the girl's lips. Instead, only a tense horror that touched to the roots of emotion.

Sarah regarded this display of feeling on the part of the young woman before her with an increasing astonishment. It was not in her own nature to be demonstrative, and such strong expression of emotion as this she deemed rather suspicious. She recalled, in addition, the fact that his was not the first time that Helen Morris had shown a particular interest in the fate of Mary Turner. Sarah wondered why.

"Say," she demanded, with the directness habitual to her, "why are you so anxious about it? This is the third time you have asked me about Mary Turner. What's it to you, I'd like to know?"

The salesgirl started violently, and a deep flush drove the accustomed pallor from her cheeks. She was obviously much disturbed by the question.

"What is it to me?" she repeated in an effort to gain time. "Why, nothing—nothing at all!" Her expression of distress lightened a little as she hit on an excuse that might serve to justify her interest. "Nothing at

all, only—she's a friend of mine, a great friend of mine. Oh, yes!" Then, in an instant, the look of relief vanished, as once again the terrible reality hammered on her consciousness, and an overwhelming dejection showed in the dull eyes and in the drooping curves of the white lips. There was a monotone of desolation as she went on speaking in a whisper meant for the ears of no other. "It's awful—three years! Oh, I didn't understand! It's awful!—awful!" With the final word, she hurried off, her head bowed. She was still murmuring brokenly, incoherently. Her whole attitude was of wondering grief.

Sarah stared after the girl in complete mystification. She could not at first guess any possible cause for an emotion so poignant. Presently, however, her shrewd, though very prosaic, commonsense suggested a simple explanation of the girl's extraordinary distress.

"I'll bet that girl has been tempted to steal. But she didn't, because she was afraid." With this satisfactory conclusion of her wonderment, the secretary hurried on her way, quite content. It never occurred to her that the girl might have been tempted to steal—and had not resisted the temptation.

It was on account of this brief conversation with the salesgirl that Sarah was thinking intently of Mary Turner, after her return to the office, from which Gilder himself happened to be absent for the moment. As the secretary glanced up at the opening of the door, she did not at first recognize the figure outlined there. She remembered Mary Turner as a tall, slender girl, who

showed an underlying vitality in every movement, a girl with a face of regular features, in which was a complexion of blended milk and roses, with a radiant joy of life shining through all her arduous and vulgar conditions. Instead of this, now, she saw a frail form that stood swaying in the opening of the doorway, that bent in a sinister fashion which told of bodily impotence, while the face was quite bloodless. And, too, there was over all else a pall of helplessness—helplessness that had endured much, and must still endure infinitely more.

As a reinforcement of the dread import of that figure of wo, a man stood beside it, and one of his hands was clasped around the girl's wrist, a man who wore his derby hat somewhat far back on his bullet-shaped head, whose feet were conspicuous in shoes with very heavy soles and very square toes.

It was the man who now took charge of the situation. Cassidy, from Headquarters, spoke in a rough, indifferent voice, well suited to his appearance of stolid strength.

"The District Attorney told me to bring this girl here on my way to the Grand Central Station with her."

Sarah got to her feet mechanically. Somehow, from the raucous notes of the policeman's voice, she understood in a flash of illumination that the pitiful figure there in the doorway was that of Mary Turner, whom she had remembered so different, so frightfully different. She spoke with a miserable effort toward her usual liveliness.

"Mr. Gilder will be right back. Come in and wait."

She wished to say something more, something of welcome or of mourning, to the girl there, but she found herself incapable of a single word for the moment, and could only stand dumb while the man stepped forward, with his charge following helplessly in his clutch.

The two went forward very slowly, the officer, carelessly conscious of his duty, walking with awkward steps to suit the feeble movements of the girl, the girl letting herself be dragged onward, aware of the futility of any resistance to the inexorable power that now had her in its grip, of which the man was the present agent. As the pair came thus falteringly into the center of the room, Sarah at last found her voice for an expression of sympathy.

"I'm sorry, Mary," she said, hesitatingly. "I'm terribly sorry, terribly sorry!"

The girl, who had halted when the officer halted, as a matter of course, did not look up. She stood still, swaying a little as if from weakness. Her voice was lifeless.

"Are you?" she said. "I did not know. Nobody has been near me the whole time I have been in the Tombs." There was infinite pathos in the tones as she repeated the words so fraught with dreadfulness. "Nobody has been near me!"

The secretary felt a sudden glow of shame. She realized the justice of that unconscious accusation, for, till to-day, she had had no thought of the suffering girl there in the prison. To assuage remorse, she sought to give evidence as to a prevalent sympathy.

"Why," she exclaimed, "there was Helen Morris to-day! She has been asking about you again and again. She's all broken up over your trouble."

But the effort on the secretary's part was wholly without success.

"Who is Helen Morris?" the lifeless voice demanded. There was no interest in the question.

Sarah experienced a momentary astonishment, for she was still remembering the feverish excitement displayed by the salesgirl, who had declared herself to be a most intimate friend of the convict. But the mystery was to remain unsolved, since Gilder now entered the office. He walked with the quick, bustling activity that was ordinarily expressed in his every movement. He paused for an instant, as he beheld the two visitors in the center of the room, then he spoke curtly to the secretary, while crossing to his chair at the desk.

"You may go, Sarah. I will ring when I wish you again."

There followed an interval of silence, while the secretary was leaving the office and the girl with her warder stood waiting on his pleasure. Gilder cleared his throat twice in an embarrassment foreign to him, before finally he spoke to the girl. At last, the proprietor of the store expressed himself in a voice of genuine sympathy, for the spectacle of wo presented there before his very eyes moved him to a real distress, since it was indeed actual, something that did not depend on an appreciation to be developed out of imagination.

"My girl," Gilder said gently—his hard voice was

softened by an honest regret—"my girl, I am sorry about this."

"You should be!" came the instant answer. Yet, the words were uttered with a total lack of emotion. It seemed from their intonation that the speaker voiced merely a statement concerning a recondite matter of truth, with which sentiment had nothing whatever to do. But the effect on the employer was unfortunate. It aroused at once his antagonism against the girl. His instinct of sympathy with which he had greeted her at the outset was repelled, and made of no avail. Worse, it was transformed into an emotion hostile to the one who thus offended him by rejection of the well-meant kindliness of his address.

"Come, come!" he exclaimed, testily. "That's no tone to take with me."

"Why? What sort of tone do you expect me to take?" was the retort in the listless voice. Yet, now, in the dullness ran a faint suggestion of something sinister.

"I expected a decent amount of humility from one in your position," was the tart rejoinder of the magnate.

Life quickened swiftly in the drooping form of the girl. Her muscles tensed. She stood suddenly erect, in the vigor of her youth again. Her face lost in the same second its bleakness of pallor. The eyes opened widely, with startling abruptness, and looked straight into those of the man who had employed her.

"Would you be humble," she demanded, and now her voice was become softly musical, yet forbidding, too,

with a note of passion, "would you be humble if you were going to prison for three years—for something you didn't do?"

There was anguish in the cry torn from the girl's throat in the sudden access of despair. The words thrilled Gilder beyond anything that he had supposed possible in such case. He found himself in this emergency totally at a loss, and moved in his chair doubtfully, wishing to say something, and quite unable. He was still seeking some question, some criticism, some rebuke, when he was unfeignedly relieved to hear the policeman's harsh voice.

"Don't mind her, sir," Cassidy said. He meant to make his manner very reassuring. "They all say that. They are innocent, of course! Yep—they all say it. It don't do 'em any good, but just the same they all swear they're innocent. They keep it up to the very last, no matter how right they've been got."

The voice of the girl rang clear. There was a note of insistence that carried a curious dignity of its own. The very simplicity of her statement might have had a power to convince one who listened without prejudice, although the words themselves were of the trite sort that any protesting criminal might utter.

"I tell you, I didn't do it!"

Gilder himself felt the surge of emotion that swung through these moments, but he would not yield to it. With his lack of imagination, he could not interpret what this time must mean to the girl before him. Rather, he merely deemed it his duty to carry through this un-

fortunate affair with a scrupulous attention to detail, in the fashion that had always been characteristic of him during the years in which he had steadily mounted from the bottom to the top.

"What's the use of all this pretense?" he demanded, sharply. "You were given a fair trial, and there's an end of it."

The girl, standing there so feebly, seeming indeed to cling for support to the man who always held her thus closely by the wrist, spoke again with an astonishing clearness, even with a sort of vivacity, as if she explained easily something otherwise in doubt.

"Oh, no, I wasn't!" she contradicted bluntly, with a singular confidence of assertion. "Why, if the trial had been fair, I shouldn't be here."

The harsh voice of Cassidy again broke in on the passion of the girl with a professional sneer.

"That's another thing they all say."

But the girl went on speaking fiercely, impervious to the man's coarse sarcasm, her eyes, which had deepened almost to purple, still fixed piercingly on Gilder, who, for some reason wholly inexplicable to him, felt himself strangely disturbed under that regard.

"Do you call it fair when the lawyer I had was only a boy—one whom the court told me to take, a boy trying his first case—my case, that meant the ruin of my life? My lawyer! Why, he was just getting experience—getting it at my expense!" The girl paused as if exhausted by the vehemence of her emotion, and at last the sparkling eyes drooped and the heavy lids closed

over them. She swayed a little, so that the officer tightened his clasp on her wrist.

There followed a few seconds of silence. Then Gilder made an effort to shake off the feeling that had so possessed him, and to a certain degree he succeeded.

"The jury found you guilty," he asserted, with an attempt to make his voice magisterial in its severity.

Instantly, Mary was aroused to a new outburst of protest. Once again, her eyes shot their fires at the man seated behind the desk, and she went forward a step imperiously, dragging the officer in her wake.

"Yes, the jury found me guilty," she agreed, with fine scorn in the musical cadences of her voice. "Do you know why? I can tell you, Mr. Gilder. It was because they had been out for three hours without reaching a decision. The evidence didn't seem to be quite enough for some of them, after all. Well, the judge threatened to lock them up all night. The men wanted to get home. The easy thing to do was to find me guilty, and let it go at that. Was that fair, do you think? And that's not all, either. Was it fair of you, Mr. Gilder? Was it fair of you to come to the court this morning, and tell the judge that I should be sent to prison as a warning to others?"

A quick flush burned on the massive face of the man whom she thus accused, and his eyes refused to meet her steady gaze of reproach.

"You know!" he exclaimed, in momentary consternation. Again, her mood had affected his own, so that through a few hurrying seconds he felt himself some-

how guilty of wrong against this girl, so frank and so rebuking.

"I heard you in the courtroom," she said. "The dock isn't very far from the bench where you spoke to the judge about my case. Yes, I heard you. It wasn't: Did I do it? Or, didn't I do it? No; it was only that I must be made a warning to others."

Again, silence fell for a tense interval. Then, finally, the girl spoke in a different tone. Where before her voice had been vibrant with the instinct of complaint against the mockery of justice under which she suffered, now there was a deeper note, that of most solemn truth.

"Mr. Gilder," she said simply, "as God is my judge, I am going to prison for three years for something I didn't do."

But the sincerity of her broken cry fell on unheeding ears. The coarse nature of the officer had long ago lost whatever elements of softness there might have been to develop in a gentler occupation. As for the owner of the store, he was not sufficiently sensitive to feel the verity in the accents of the speaker. Moreover, he was a man who followed the conventional, with never a distraction due to imagination and sympathy. Just now, too, he was experiencing a keen irritation against himself because of the manner in which he had been sensible to the influence of her protestation, despite his will to the contrary. That irritation against himself only reacted against the girl, and caused him to steel his heart to resist any tendency toward commiseration. So, this declaration of innocence was made quite in vain—in-

deed, served rather to strengthen his disfavor toward the complainant, and to make his manner harsher when she voiced the pitiful question over which she had wondered and grieved.

"Why did you ask the judge to send me to prison?"

"The thieving that has been going on in this store for over a year has got to stop," Gilder answered emphatically, with all his usual energy of manner restored. As he spoke, he raised his eyes and met the girl's glance fairly. Thought of the robberies was quite enough to make him pitiless toward the offender.

"Sending me to prison won't stop it," Mary Turner said, drearily.

"Perhaps not," Gilder sternly retorted. "But the discovery and punishment of the other guilty ones will." His manner changed to a business-like alertness. "You sent word to me that you could tell me how to stop the thefts in the store. Well, my girl, do this, and, while I can make no definite promise, I'll see what can be done about getting you out of your present difficulty." He picked up a pencil, pulled a pad of blank paper convenient to his hand, and looked at the girl expectantly, with aggressive inquiry in his gaze. "Tell me now," he concluded, "who were your pals?"

The matter-of-fact manner of this man who had unwittingly wronged her so frightfully was the last straw on the girl's burden of suffering. Under it, her patient endurance broke, and she cried out in a voice of utter despair that caused Gilder to start nervously, and even impelled the stolid officer to a frown of remonstrance.

"I have no pals!" she ejaculated, furiously. "I never stole anything in my life. Must I go on telling you over and over again?" Her voice rose in a wail of misery. "Oh, why won't any one believe me?"

Gilder was much offended by this display of an hysterical grief, which seemed to his phlegmatic temperament altogether unwarranted by the circumstances. He spoke decisively.

"Unless you can control yourself, you must go." He pushed away the pad of paper, and tossed the pencil aside in physical expression of his displeasure. "Why did you send that message, if you have nothing to say?" he demanded, with increasing choler.

But now the girl had regained her former poise. She stood a little drooping and shaken, where for a moment she had been erect and tensed. There was a vast weariness in her words as she answered.

"I have something to tell you, Mr. Gilder," she said, quietly. "Only, I—I sort of lost my grip on the way here, with this man by my side."

"Most of 'em do, the first time," the officer commented, with a certain grim appreciation.

"Well?" Gilder insisted querulously, as the girl hesitated.

At once, Mary went on speaking, and now a little increase of vigor trembled in her tones.

"When you sit in a cell for three months waiting for your trial, as I did, you think a lot. And, so, I got the idea that if I could talk to you, I might be able to make you understand what's really wrong. And if I could

do that, and so help out the other girls, what has happened to me would not, after all, be quite so awful—so useless, somehow." Her voice lowered to a quick pleading, and she bent toward the man at the desk. "Mr. Gilder," she questioned, "do you really want to stop the girls from stealing?"

"Most certainly I do," came the forcible reply.

The girl spoke with a great earnestness, deliberately.

"Then, give them a fair chance."

The magnate stared in sincere astonishment over this absurd, this futile suggestion for his guidance.

"What do you mean?" he vociferated, with rising indignation. There was an added hostility in his demeanor, for it seemed to him that this thief of his goods whom he had brought to justice was daring to trifle with him. He grew wrathful over the suspicion, but a secret curiosity still held his temper within bounds. "What do you mean?" he repeated; and now the full force of his strong voice set the room trembling.

The tones of the girl came softly musical, made more delicately resonant to the ear by contrast with the man's roaring.

"Why," she said, very gently, "I mean just this: Give them a living chance to be honest."

"A living chance!" The two words were exploded with dynamic violence. The preposterousness of the advice fired Gilder with resentment so pervasive that through many seconds he found himself unable to express the rage that flamed within him.

The girl showed herself undismayed by his anger.

"Yes," she went on, quietly; "that's all there is to it. Give them a living chance to get enough food to eat, and a decent room to sleep in, and shoes that will keep their feet off the pavement winter mornings. Do you think that any girl wants to steal? Do you think that any girl wants to risk——?"

By this time, however, Gilder had regained his powers of speech, and he interrupted stormily.

"And is this what you have taken up my time for? You want to make a maudlin plea for guilty, dishonest girls, when I thought you really meant to bring me facts."

Nevertheless, Mary went on with her arraignment uncompromisingly. There was a strange, compelling energy in her inflections that penetrated even the pachydermatous officer, so that, though he thought her raving, he let her rave on, which was not at all his habit of conduct, and did indeed surprise him mightily. As for Gilder, he felt helpless in some puzzling fashion that was totally foreign to his ordinary self. He was still glowing with wrath over the method by which he had been victimized into giving the girl a hearing. Yet, despite his chagrin, he realized that he could not send her from him forthwith. By some inexplicable spell she bound him impotent.

"We work nine hours a day," the quiet voice went on, a curious pathos in the rich *timbre* of it; "nine hours a day, for six days in the week. That's a fact, isn't it? And the trouble is, an honest girl can't live on six dollars a week. She can't do it, and buy food and clothes,

and pay room-rent and carfare. That's another fact, isn't it?"

Mary regarded the owner of the store with grave questioning in her violet eyes. Under the urgency of emotion, color crept into the pallid cheeks, and now her face was very beautiful—so beautiful, indeed, that for a little the charm of its loveliness caught the man's gaze, and he watched her with a new respect, born of appreciation for her feminine delightfulness. The impression was far too brief. Gilder was not given to esthetic raptures over women. Always, the business instinct was the dominant. So, after the short period of amazed admiration over such unexpected winsomeness, his thoughts flew back angrily to the matters whereof she spoke so ridiculously.

"I don't care to discuss these things," he declared peremptorily, as the girl remained silent for a moment.

"And I have no wish to discuss anything," Mary returned evenly. "I only want to give you what you asked for—facts." A faint smile of reminiscence curved the girl's lips. "When they first locked me up," she explained, without any particular evidence of emotion, "I used to sit and hate you."

"Oh, of course!" came the caustic exclamation from Gilder.

"And then, I thought that perhaps you did not understand," Mary continued; "that, if I were to tell you how things really are, it might be you would change them somehow."

At this ingenuous statement, the owner of the store gave forth a gasp of sheer stupefaction.

"I!" he cried, incredulously. "I change my business policy because you ask me to!"

There was something imperturbable in the quality of the voice as the girl went resolutely forward with her explanation. It was as if she were discharging a duty not to be gainsaid, not to be thwarted by any difficulty, not even the realization that all the effort must be ultimately in vain.

"Do you know how we girls live?—but, of course, you don't. Three of us in one room, doing our own cooking over the two-burner gas-stove, and our own washing and ironing evenings, after being on our feet for nine hours."

The enumeration of the sordid details left the employer absolutely unmoved, since he lacked the imagination necessary to sympathize actually with the straining evil of a life such as the girl had known. Indeed, he spoke with an air of just remonstrance, as if the girl's charges were mischievously faulty.

"I have provided chairs behind the counters," he stated.

There was no especial change in the girl's voice as she answered his defense. It continued musically low, but there was in it the insistent note of sincerity.

"But have you ever seen a girl sitting in one of them?" she questioned, coldly. "Please answer me. Have you? Of course not," she said, after a little pause during which the owner had remained silent. She shook

her head in emphatic negation. "And do you understand why? It's simply because every girl knows that the manager of her department would think he could get along without her, if he were to see her sitting down ——loafing, you know! So, she would be discharged. All it amounts to is that, after being on her feet for nine hours, the girl usually walks home, in order to save carfare. Yes, she walks, whether sick or well. Anyhow, you are generally so tired, it don't make much difference which you are."

Gilder was fuming under these strictures, which seemed to him altogether baseless attacks on himself. His exasperation steadily waxed against the girl, a convicted felon, who thus had the audacity to beard him.

"What has all this to do with the question of theft in the store?" he rumbled, huffily. "That was the excuse for your coming here. And, instead of telling me something, you rant about gas-stoves and carfare."

The inexorable voice went on in its monotone, as if he had not spoken.

"And, when you are really sick, and have to stop work, what are you going to do then? Do you know, Mr. Gilder, that the first time a straight girl steals, it's often because she had to have a doctor—or some luxury like that? And some of them do worse than steal. Yes, they do—girls that started straight, and wanted to stay that way. But, of course, some of them get so tired of the whole grind that—that——"

The man who was the employer of hundreds concerning whom these grim truths were uttered, stirred uneas-

ily in his chair, and there came a touch of color into the healthy brown of his cheeks as he spoke his protest.

"I'm not their guardian. I can't watch over them after they leave the store. They are paid the current rate of wages—as much as any other store pays." As he spoke, the anger provoked by this unexpected assault on him out of the mouth of a convict flamed high in virtuous repudiation. "Why," he went on vehemently, "no man living does more for his employees than I do. Who gave the girls their fine rest-rooms upstairs? I did! Who gave them the cheap lunch-rooms? I did!"

"But you won't pay them enough to live on!" The very fact that the words were spoken without any trace of rancor merely made this statement of indisputable truth obnoxious to the man, who was stung to more savage resentment in asserting his impugned self-righteousness.

"I pay them the same as the other stores do," he repeated, sullenly.

Yet once again, the gently cadenced voice gave answer, an answer informed with that repulsive insistence to the man who sought to resist her indictment of him.

"But you won't pay them enough to live on." The simple lucidity of the charge forbade direct reply.

Gilder betook himself to evasion by harking back to the established ground of complaint.

"And, so, you claim that you were forced to steal. That's the plea you make for yourself and your friends."

"I wasn't forced to steal," came the answer, spoken

in the monotone that had marked her utterance throughout most of the interview. "I wasn't forced to steal, and I didn't steal. But, all the same, that's the plea, as you call it, that I'm making for the other girls. There are hundreds of them who steal because they don't get enough to eat. I said I would tell you how to stop the stealing. Well, I have done it. Give the girls a fair chance to be honest. You asked me for the names, Mr. Gilder. There's only one name on which to put the blame for the whole business—and that name is Edward Gilder! . . . . Now, won't you do something about it?"

At that naked question, the owner of the store jumped up from his chair, and stood glowering at the girl who risked a request so full of vituperation against himself.

"How dare you speak to me like this?" he thundered.

There was no disconcertion exhibited by the one thus challenged. On the contrary, she repeated her question with a simple dignity that still further outraged the man.

"Won't you, please, do something about it?"

"How dare you?" he shouted again. Now, there was stark wonder in his eyes as he put the question.

"Why, I dared," Mary Turner explained, "because you have done all the harm you can to me. And, now, I'm trying to give you the chance to do better by the others. You ask me why I dare. I have a right to dare! I have been straight all my life. I have wanted decent food and warm clothes, and—a little happiness, all the time I have worked for you, and I have gone without those things, just to stay straight. . . . The

end of it all is: You are sending me to prison for something I didn't do. That's why I dare!"

Cassidy, the officer in charge of Mary Turner, had stood patiently beside her all this while, always holding her by the wrist. He had been mildly interested in the verbal duel between the big man of the department store and this convict in his own keeping. Vaguely, he had marveled at the success of the frail girl in declaiming of her injuries before the magnate. He had felt no particular interest beyond that, merely looking on as one might at any entertaining spectacle. The question at issue was no concern of his. His sole business was to take the girl away when the interview should be ended. It occurred to him now that this might, in fact, be the time to depart. It seemed, indeed, that the insistent reiteration of the girl had at last left he owner of the store quite powerless to answer. It was possible, then, that it were wiser the girl should be removed. With the idea in mind, he stared inquiringly at Gilder until he caught that flustered gentleman's eye. A nod from the magnate sufficed him. Gilder, in truth, could not trust himself just then to an audible command. He was seriously disturbed by the gently spoken truths that had issued from the girl's lips. He was not prepared with any answer, though he hotly resented every word of her accusation. So, when he caught the question in the glance of the officer, he felt a guilty sensation of relief as he signified an affirmative by his gesture.

Cassidy faced about, and in his movement there was a tug at the wrist of the girl that set her moving toward

the door. Her realization of what this meant was shown in her final speech.

"Oh, he can take me now," she said, bitterly. Then her voice rose above the monotone that had contented her hitherto. Into the music of her tones beat something sinister, evilly vindictive, as she faced about at the doorway to which Cassidy had led her. Her face, as she scrutinized once again the man at the desk, was coldly malignant.

"Three years isn't forever," she said, in a level voice. "When I come out, you are going to pay for every minute of them, Mr. Gilder. There won't be a day or an hour that I won't remember that at the last it was your word sent me to prison. And you are going to pay me for that. You are going to pay me for the five years I have starved making money for you—that, too! You are going to pay me for all the things I am losing today, and——"

The girl thrust forth her left hand, on that side where stood the officer. So vigorous was her movement that Cassidy's clasp was thrown off the wrist. But the bond between the two was not broken, for from wrist to wrist showed taut the steel chain of the manacles. The girl shook the links of the handcuffs in a gesture stronger than words. In her final utterance to the agitated man at the desk, there was a cold threat, a prophecy of disaster. From the symbol of her degradation, she looked to the man whose action had placed it there. In the clashing of their glances, hers won the victory, so that his eyes fell before the menace in hers.

"You are going to pay me for this!" she said. Her voice was little more than a whisper, but it was loud in the listener's heart. "Yes, you are going to pay—for this!"

CHAPTER VI.

INFERNO.

They were grim years, those three during which Mary Turner served her sentence in Burnsing. There was no time off for good behavior. The girl learned soon that the favor of those set in authority over her could only be won at a cost against which her every maidenly instinct revolted. So, she went through the inferno of days and nights in a dreariness of suffering that was deadly. Naturally, the life there was altogether an evil thing. There was the material ill ever present in the round of wearisome physical toil, the coarse, distasteful food, the hard, narrow couch, the constant, gnawing irksomeness of imprisonment, away from light and air, away from all that makes life worth while.

Yet, these afflictions were not the worst injuries to mar the girl convict's life. That which bore upon her most weightily and incessantly was the degradation of this environment from which there was never any respite, the viciousness of this spot wherein she had been cast through no fault of her own. Vileness was everywhere, visibly in the faces of many, and it was brimming from the souls of more, subtly hideous. The girl held herself rigidly from any personal intimacy with her fellows. To some extent, at least, she could separate her-

self from their corruption in the matter of personal association. But, ever present, there was a secret energy of vice that could not be escaped so simply—nor, indeed, by any device; that breathed in the spiritual atmosphere itself of the place. Always, this mysterious, invisible, yet horribly potent, power of sin was like a miasma throughout the prison. Always, it was striving to reach her soul, to make her of its own. She fought the insidious, fetid force as best she might. She was not evil by nature. She had been well grounded in principles of righteousness. Nevertheless, though she maintained the integrity of her character, that character suffered from the taint. There developed over the girl's original sensibility a shell of hardness, which in time would surely come to make her less scrupulous in her reckoning of right and wrong.

Yet, as a rule, character remains the same throughout life as to its prime essentials, and, in this case, Mary Turner at the end of her term was vitally almost as wholesome as on the day when she began the serving of the sentence. The change wrought in her was chiefly of an external sort. The kindliness of her heart and her desire for the seemly joys of life were unweakened. But over the better qualities of her nature was now spread a crust of worldly hardness, a denial of appeal to her sensibilities. It was this that would eventually bring her perilously close to contented companioning with crime.

The best evidence of the fact that Mary Turner's soul was not fatally soiled must be found in the fact that still, at the expiration of her sentence, she was fully re-

solved to live straight, as the saying is which she had quoted to Gilder. This, too, in the face of sure knowledge as to the difficulties that would beset the effort, and in the face of the temptations offered to follow an easier path.

There was, for example, Aggie Lynch, a fellow convict, with whom she had a slight degree of acquaintance, nothing more. This young woman, a criminal by training, offered allurements of illegitimate employment in the outer world when they should be free. Mary endured the companionship with this prisoner because a sixth sense proclaimed the fact that here was one unmoral, rather than immoral—and the difference is mighty. For that reason, Aggie Lynch was not actively offensive, as were most of the others. She was a dainty little blonde, with a baby face, in which were set two light-blue eyes, of a sort to widen often in demure wonder over most things in a surprising and naughty world. She had been convicted of blackmail, and she made no pretense even of innocence. Instead, she was inclined to boast over her ability to bamboozle men at her will. She was a natural actress of the ingénue rôle, and in that pose she could unfailingly beguile the heart of the wisest of worldly men.

Perhaps, the very keen student of physiognomy might have discovered grounds for suspecting her demureness by reason of the thick, level brows that cast a shadow on the bland innocence of her face. For the rest, she possessed a knack of rather harmless perversity, a fair smattering of grammar and spelling, and a

lively sense of humor within her own limitations, with a particularly small intelligence in other directions. Her one art was histrionics of the kind that made an individual appeal. In such, she was inimitable. She had been reared in a criminal family, which must excuse much. Long ago, she had lost track of her father; her mother she had never known. Her one relation was a brother of high standing as a pickpocket. One principal reason of her success in leading on men to make fools of themselves over her, to their everlasting regret afterward, lay in the fact that, in spite of all the gross irregularities of her life, she remained chaste. She deserved no credit for such restraint, since it was a matter purely of temperament, not of resolve.

The girl saw in Mary Turner the possibilities of a ladylike personality that might mean much financial profit in the devious ways of which she was a mistress. With the frankness characteristic of her, she proceeded to paint glowing pictures of a future shared to the undoing of ardent and fatuous swains. Mary Turner listened with curiosity, but she was in no wise moved to follow such a life, even though it did not necessitate anything worse than a fraudulent playing at love, without physical degradation. So, she steadfastly continued her refusals, to the great astonishment of Aggie, who actually could not understand in the least, even while she believed the other's declaration of innocence of the crime for which she was serving a sentence. But, for her own part, such innocence had nothing to do with the matter. Where, indeed, could be the harm in mak-

ing some old sinner pay a round price for his folly? And always, in response to every argument, Mary shook her head in negation. She would live straight.

Then, the heavy brows of Aggie would draw down a little, and the baby face would harden.

"You will find that you are up against a hell of a frost," she would declare, brutally.

Mary found the profane prophecy true. Back in New York, she experienced a poverty more ravaging than any she had known in those five lean years of her working in the store. She had been absolutely penniless for two days, and without food through the gnawing hours, when she at last found employment of the humblest in a milliner's shop. Followed a blessed interval in which she worked contentedly, happy over the meager stipend, since it served to give her shelter and food honestly earned.

But the ways of the police are not always those of ordinary decency. In due time, an officer informed Mary's employer concerning the fact of her record as a convict, and thereupon she was at once discharged. The unfortunate victim of the law came perilously close to despair then. Yet, her spirit triumphed, and again she persevered in that resolve to live straight. Finally, for the second time, she secured a cheap position in a cheap shop—only to be again persecuted by the police, so that she speedily lost the place.

Nevertheless, indomitable in her purpose, she maintained the struggle. A third time she obtained work, and there, after a little, she told her employer, a candy

manufacturer in a small way, the truth as to her having been in prison. The man had a kindly heart, and, in addition, he ran little risk in the matter, so he allowed her to remain. When, presently, the police called his attention to the girl's criminal record, he paid no heed to their advice against retaining her services. But such action on his part offended the greatness of the law's dignity. The police brought pressure to bear on the man. They even called in the assistance of Edward Gilder himself, who obligingly wrote a very severe letter to the girl's employer. In the end, such tactics alarmed the man. For the sake of his own interests, though unwillingly enough, he dismissed Mary from his service.

It was then that despair did come upon the girl. She had tried with all the strength of her to live straight. Yet, despite her innocence, the world would not let her live according to her own conscience. It demanded that she be the criminal it had branded her—if she were to live at all. So, it was despair! For she would not turn to evil, and without such turning she could not live. She still walked the streets falteringly, seeking some place; but her heart was gone from the quest. Now, she was sunken in an apathy that saved her from the worst pangs of misery. She had suffered so much, so poignantly, that at last her emotions had grown sluggish. She did not mind much even when her tiny hoard of money was quite gone, and she roamed the city, starving. . . . Came an hour when she thought of the river, and was glad!

Mary remembered, with a wan smile, how, long ago,

she had thought with amazed horror of suicide, unable to imagine any trouble sufficient to drive one to death as the only relief. Now, however, the thing was simple to her. Since there was nothing else, she must turn to that—to death. Indeed, it was so very simple, so final, and so easy, after the agonies she had endured, that she marveled over her own folly in not having sought such escape before. . . . Even with the first wild fancy, she had unconsciously bent her steps westward toward the North River. Now, she quickened her pace, anxious for the plunge that should set the term to sorrow. In her numbed brain was no flicker of thought as to whatever might come to her afterward. Her sole guide was that compelling passion of desire to be done with this unbearable present. Nothing else mattered—not in the least!

So, she came through the long stretch of ill-lighted streets, crossed some railroad tracks to a pier, over which she hurried to the far end, where it projected out to the fiercer currents of the Hudson. There, without giving herself a moment's pause for reflection or hesitation, she leaped out as far as her strength permitted into the coil of waters. . . . But, in that final second, natural terror in the face of death overcame the lethargy of despair—a shriek burst from her lips.

But for that scream of fear, the story of Mary Turner had ended there and then. Only one person was anywhere near to catch the sound. And that single person heard. On the south side of the pier a man had just tied up a motor-boat. He stood up in alarm

at the cry, and was just in time to gain a glimpse of a white face under the dim moonlight as it swept down with the tide, two rods beyond him. On the instant, he threw off his coat and sprang far out after the drifting body. He came to it in a few furious strokes, caught it. Then began the savage struggle to save her and himself. The currents tore at him wrathfully, but he fought against them with all the fierceness of his nature. He had strength a-plenty, but it needed all of it, and more, to win out of the river's hungry clutch. What saved the two of them was the violent temper of the man. Always, it had been the demon to set him aflame. Tonight, there in the faint light, within the grip of the waters, he was moved to insensate fury against the element that menaced. His rage mounted, and gave him new power in the battle. Maniacal strength grew out of supreme wrath. Under the urge of it, he conquered—at last brought himself and his charge to the shore.

When, finally, the rescuer was able to do something more than gasp chokingly, he gave anxious attention to the woman whom he had brought out from the river. Yet, at the outset, he could not be sure that she still lived. She had shown no sign of life at any time since he had first seized her. That fact had been of incalculable advantage to him in his efforts to reach the shore with her. Now, however, it alarmed him mightily, though it hardly seemed possible that she could have drowned. So far as he could determine, she had not even sunk once beneath the surface. Nevertheless, she displayed no evidence of vitality, though he chafed her

hands for a long time. The shore here was very lonely; it would take precious time to summon aid. It seemed, notwithstanding, that this must be the only course. Then just as the man was about to leave her, the girl sighed, very faintly, with an infinite weariness, and opened her eyes. The man echoed the sigh, but his was of joy, since now he knew that his strife in the girl's behalf had not been in vain.

Afterward, the rescuer experienced no great difficulty in carrying out his work to a satisfactory conclusion. Mary revived to clear consciousness, which was at first inclined toward hysteria, but this phase yielded soon under the sympathetic ministrations of the man. His rather low voice was soothing to her tired soul, and his whole air was at once masterful and gently tender. Moreover, there was an inexpressible balm to her spirit in the very fact that some one was thus ministering to her. It was the first time for many dreadful years that any one had taken thought for her welfare. The effect of it was like a draught of rarest wine to warm her heart. So, she rested obediently as he busied himself with her complete restoration, and, when finally she was able to stand, and to walk with the support of his arm, she went forward slowly at his side without so much even as a question of whither.

And, curiously, the man himself shared the gladness that touched the mood of the girl, for he experienced a sudden pride in his accomplishment of the night, a pride that delighted a starved part of his nature. Somewhere in him were the seeds of self-sacrifice, the seeds of a

generous devotion to others. But those seeds had been left undeveloped in a life that had been lived since early boyhood outside the pale of respectability. To-night, Joe Garson had performed, perhaps, his first action with no thought of self at the back of it. He had risked his life to save that of a stranger. The fact astonished him, while it pleased him hugely. The sensation was at once novel and thrilling. Since it was so agreeable, he meant to prolong the glow of self-satisfaction by continuing to care for this waif of the river. He must make his rescue complete. It did not occur to him to question his fitness for the work. His introspection did not reach to a point of suspecting that he, an habitual criminal, was necessarily of a sort to be most objectionable as the protector of a young girl. Indeed, had any one suggested the thought to him, he would have met it with a sneer, to the effect that a wretch thus tired of life could hardly object to any one who constituted himself her savior.

In this manner, Joe Garson, the notorious forger, led the dripping girl eastward through the squalid streets, until at last they came to an adequately lighted avenue, and there a taxicab was found. It carried them farther north, and to the east still, until at last it came to a halt before an apartment house that was rather imposing, set in a street of humbler dwellings. Here, Garson paid the fare, and then helped the girl to alight, and on into the hallway. Mary went with him quite unafraid, though now with a growing curiosity. Strange as it all was, she felt that she could trust this man who

had plucked her from death, who had worked over her with so much of tender kindliness. So, she waited patiently; only, watched with intentness as he pressed the button of a flat number. She observed with interest the thick, wavy gray of his hair, which contradicted pleasantly the youthfulness of his clean-shaven, resolute face, and the spare, yet well-muscled form.

The clicking of the door-latch sounded soon, and the two entered, and went slowly up three flights of stairs. On the landing beyond the third flight, the door of a rear flat stood open, and in the doorway appeared the figure of a woman.

"Well, Joe, who's the skirt?" this person demanded, as the man and his charge halted before her. Then, abruptly, the round, baby-like face of the woman puckered in amazement. Her voice rose shrill. "My Gawd, if it ain't Mary Turner!"

At that, the newcomer's eyes opened swiftly to their widest, and she stared astounded in her turn.

"Aggie!" she cried.

CHAPTER VII.

WITHIN THE LAW.

In the time that followed, Mary lived in the flat which Aggie Lynch occupied along with her brother, Jim, a pickpocket much esteemed among his fellow craftsmen. The period wrought transformations of a radical and bewildering sort in both the appearance and the character of the girl. Joe Garson, the forger, had long been acquainted with Aggie and her brother, though he considered them far beneath him in the social scale, since their criminal work was not of that high kind on which he prided himself. But, as he cast about for some woman to whom he might take the hapless girl he had rescued, his thoughts fell on Aggie, and forthwith his determination was made, since he knew that she was respectable, viewed according to his own peculiar lights. He was relieved rather than otherwise to learn that there was already an acquaintance between the two women, and the fact that his charge had served time in prison did not influence him one jot against her. On the contrary, it increased in some measure his respect for her as one of his own kind. By the time he had learned as well of her innocence, he had grown so interested that even her folly, as he was inclined to deem it, did not cause any wavering in his regard.

Now, at last, Mary Turner let herself drift. It seemed to her that she had abandoned herself to fate in that hour when she threw herself into the river. Afterward, without any volition on her part, she had been restored to life, and set within an environment new and strange to her, in which soon, to her surprise, she discovered a vivid pleasure. So, she fought no more, but left destiny to work its will unhampered by her futile strivings. For the first time in her life, thanks to the hospitality of Aggie Lynch, secretly reinforced from the funds of Joe Garson, Mary found herself living in luxurious idleness, while her every wish could be gratified by the merest mention of it. She was fed on the daintiest of fare, for Aggie was a sybarite in all sensuous pleasures that were apart from sex. She was clothed with the most delicate richness for the first time as to those more mysterious garments which women love, and she soon had a variety of frocks as charming as her graceful form demanded. In addition, there were as many of books and magazines as she could wish. Her mind, long starved like her body, seized avidly on the nourishment thus afforded. In this interest, Aggie had no share—was perhaps a little envious over Mary's absorption in printed pages. But for her consolation were the matters of food and dress, and of countless junketings. In such directions, Aggie was the leader, an eager, joyous one always. She took a vast pride in her guest, with the unmistakable air of elegance, and she dared to dream of great triumphs to

come, though as yet she carefully avoided any suggestion to Mary of wrong-doing.

In the end, the suggestion came from Mary Turner herself, to the great surprise of Aggie, and, truth to tell, of herself.

There were two factors that chiefly influenced her decision. The first was due to the feeling that, since the world had rejected her, she need no longer concern herself with the world's opinion, or retain any scruples over it. Back of this lay her bitter sentiment toward the man who had been the direct cause of her imprisonment, Edward Gilder. It seemed to her that the general warfare against the world might well be made an initial step in the warfare she meant to wage, somehow, some time, against that man personally, in accordance with the hysterical threat she had uttered to his face.

The factor that was the immediate cause of her decision on an irregular mode of life was an editorial in one of the daily newspapers. This was a scathing arraignment of a master in high finance. The point of the writer's attack was the grim sarcasm for such methods of thievery as are kept within the law. That phrase held the girl's fancy, and she read the article again with a quickened interest. Then, she began to meditate. She herself was in a curious, indeterminate attitude as far as concerned the law. It was the law that had worked the ruin of her life, which she had striven to make wholesome. In consequence, she felt for the law no genuine respect, only detestation as for the epi-

tome of injustice. Yet, she gave it a superficial respect, born of those three years of suffering which had been the result of the penalty inflicted on her. It was as an effect of this latter feeling that she was determined on one thing of vital importance: that never would she be guilty of anything to pit her against the law's decrees. She had known too many hours of anguish in the doom set on her life because she had been deemed a violator of the law. No, never would she let herself take any position in which the law could accuse her. . . . But there remained the fact that the actual cause of her long misery was this same law, manipulated by the man she hated. It had punished her, though she had been without fault. For that reason, she must always regard it as her enemy, must, indeed, hate it with an intensity beyond words—with an intensity equal to that she bore the man, Gilder. Now, in the paragraph she had just read she found a clue to suggestive thought, a hint as to a means by which she might satisfy her rancor against the law that had outraged her—and this in safety since she would attempt nought save that within the law.

Mary's heart leaped at the possibility back of those three words, "within the law." She might do anything, seek any revenge, work any evil, enjoy any mastery, as long as she should keep within the law. There could be no punishment then. That was the lesson taught by the captain in high finance. He was at pains always in his stupendous robberies to keep within the law. To that end, he employed lawyers of mighty cunning and learning to guide his steps aright in such tortuous paths.

There, then, was the secret. Why should she not use the like means? Why, indeed? She had brains enough to devise, surely. Beyond that, she needed only to keep her course most carefully within those limits of wrong-doing permitted by the statutes. For that, the sole requirement would be a lawyer equally unscrupulous and astute. At once, Mary's mind was made up. After all, the thing was absurdly simple. It was merely a matter for ingenuity and for prudence in alliance. . . . Moreover, there would come eventually some adequate device against her arch-enemy, Edward Gilder.

Mary meditated on the idea for many days, and ever it seemed increasingly good to her. Finally, it developed to a point where she believed it altogether feasible, and then she took Joe Garson into her confidence. He was vastly astonished at the outset and not quite pleased, To his view, this plan offered merely a fashion of setting difficulties in the way of achievement. Presently, however, the sincerity and persistence of the girl won him over. The task of convincing him would have been easier had he himself ever known the torment of serving a term in prison. Thus far, however, the forger had always escaped the penalty for his crimes, though often close to conviction. But Mary's arguments were of a compelling sort as she set them forth in detail, and they made their appeal to Garson, who was by no means lacking in a shrewd native intelligence. He agreed that the experiment should be made, notwithstanding the fact that he felt no particular enthusiasm over the proposed scheme of working. It is likely that his own

strong feeling of attraction toward the girl whom he had saved from death, who now appeared before him as a radiantly beautiful young woman, was more persuasive than the excellent ideas which she presented so emphatically, and with a logic so impressive.

An agreement was made by which Joe Garson and certain of his more trusted intimates in the underworld were to put themselves under the orders of Mary concerning the sphere of their activities. Furthermore, they bound themselves not to engage in any devious business without her consent. Aggie, too, was one of the company thus constituted, but she figured little in the preliminary discussions, since neither Mary nor the forger had much respect for the intellectual capabilities of the adventuress, though they appreciated to the full her remarkable powers of influencing men to her will.

It was not difficult to find a lawyer suited to the necessities of the undertaking. Mary bore in mind constantly the high financier's reliance on the legal adviser competent to invent a method whereby to baffle the law at any desired point, and after judicious investigation she selected an ambitious and experienced Jew named Sigismund Harris, just in the prime of his mental vigors, who possessed a knowledge of the law only to be equalled by his disrespect for it. He seemed, indeed, precisely the man to fit the situation for one desirous of outraging the law remorselessly, while still retaining a place absolutely within it.

Forthwith, the scheme was set in operation. As a first step, Mary Turner became a young lady of inde-

pendent fortune, who had living with her a cousin, Miss Agnes Lynch. The flat was abandoned. In its stead was an apartment in the nineties on Riverside Drive, in which the ladies lived alone with two maids to serve them. Garson had rooms in the neighborhood, but Jim Lynch, who persistently refused the conditions of such an alliance, betook himself afar, to continue his reckless gathering of other folk's money in such wise as to make him amenable to the law the very first time he should be caught at it.

A few tentative ventures resulted in profits so large that the company grew mightily enthusiastic over the novel manner of working. In each instance, Harris was consulted, and made his confidential statement as to the legality of the thing proposed. Mary gratified her eager mind by careful studies in this chosen line of nefariousness. After a few perfectly legal breach-of-promise suits, due to Aggie's winsome innocence of demeanor, had been settled advantageously out of court, Mary devised a scheme of greater elaborateness, with the legal acumen of the lawyer to endorse it in the matter of safety.

This netted thirty thousand dollars. It was planned as the swindling of a swindler—which, in fact, had now become the secret principle in Mary's morality.

A gentleman possessed of some means, none too scrupulous himself, but with high financial aspirations, advertised for a partner to invest capital in a business sure to bring large returns. This advertisement caught the eye of Mary Turner, and she answered it. An in-

troductory correspondence encouraged her to hope for the victory in a game of cunning against cunning. She consulted with the perspicacious Mr. Harris, and especially sought from him detailed information as to partnership law. His statements gave her such confidence that presently she entered into a partnership with the advertiser. By the terms of their agreement, each deposited thirty thousand dollars to the partnership account. This sum of sixty thousand dollars was ostensibly to be devoted to the purchase of a tract of land, which should afterward be divided into lots, and resold to the public at enormous profit. As a matter of fact, the advertiser planned to make a spurious purchase of the tract in question, by means of forged deeds granted by an accomplice, thus making through fraud a neat profit of thirty thousand dollars. The issue was, however, disappointing to him in the extreme. No sooner was the sixty thousand dollars on deposit in the bank than Mary Turner drew out the whole amount, as she had a perfect right to do legally. When the advertiser learned of this, he was, naturally enough, full to overflowing with wrath. But after an interview with Harris he swallowed this wrath as best he might. He found that his adversary knew a dangerous deal as to his various swindling operations. In short, he could not go into court with clean hands, which is a prime stipulation of the law—though often honored in the breach. But the advertiser's hands were too perilously filthy, so he let himself be mulcted in raging silence.

The event established Mary as the arbiter in her

own coterie. Here was, in truth, a new game, a game most entertaining, and most profitable, and not in the least risky. Immediately after the adventure with the advertiser, Mary decided that a certain General Hastings would make an excellent sacrifice on the altar of justice—and to her own financial profit. The old man was a notorious roué, of most unsavory reputation as a destroyer of innocence. It was probable that he would easily fall a victim to the ingenuous charms of Aggie. As for that precocious damsel, she would run no least risk of destruction by the satyr. So, presently, there were elaborate plottings. General Hastings met Aggie in the most casual way. He was captivated by her freshness and beauty, her demureness, her ignorance of all things vicious. Straightway, he set his snares, being himself already limed. He showered every gallant attention on the naïve bread-and-butter miss, and succeeded gratifyingly soon in winning her heart—to all appearance. But he gained nothing more, for the coy creature abruptly developed most effective powers of resistance to every blandishment that went beyond strictest propriety. His ardor cooled suddenly when Harris filed the papers in a suit for ten thousand dollars damages for breach of promise.

Even while this affair was still in the course of execution, Mary found herself engaged in a direction that offered at least the hope of attaining her great desire, revenge against Edward Gilder. This opportunity came in the person of his son, Dick. After much contriving, she secured an introduction to that young

man. Forthwith, she showed herself so deliciously womanly, so intelligent, so daintily feminine, so singularly beautiful, that the young man was enamored almost at once. The fact thrilled Mary to the depths of her heart, for in this son of the man whom she hated she saw the instrument of vengeance for which she had so longed. Yet, this one thing was so vital to her that she said nothing of her purposes, not even to Aggie, though that observant person may have possessed suspicions more or less near the truth.

It was some such suspicion that lay behind her speech as, in negligée, she sat cross-legged on the bed, smoking a cigarette in a very knowing way, while watching Mary, who was adjusting her hat before the mirror of her dressing-table, one pleasant spring morning.

"Dollin' up a whole lot, ain't you?" Aggie remarked, affably, with that laxity of language which characterized her natural moods.

"I have a very important engagement with Dick Gilder," Mary replied, tranquilly. She vouchsafed nothing more definite as to her intentions.

"Nice boy, ain't he?" Aggie ventured, insinuatingly.

"Oh, I suppose so," came the indifferent answer from Mary, as she tilted the picture hat to an angle a trifle more jaunty.

The pseudo cousin sniffed.

"You s'pose that, do you? Well, anyhow, he's here so much we ought to be chargin' him for his meal-ticket. And yet I ain't sure that you even know whether he's the real goods, or not."

The fair face of Mary Turner hardened the least bit. There shone an expression of inscrutable disdain in the violet eyes, as she turned to regard Aggie with a level glance.

"I know that he's the son—the only son!—of Edward Gilder. The fact is enough for me."

The adventuress of the demure face shook her head in token of complete bafflement. Her rosy lips pouted in petulant dissatisfaction.

"I don't get you, Mary," she admitted, querulously. "You never used to look at the men. The way you acted when you first run round with me, I thought you sure was a suffragette. And then you met this young Gilder —and—good-night, nurse!"

The hardness remained in Mary's face, as she continued to regard her friend. But, now, there was something quizzical in the glance with which she accompanied the monosyllable:

"Well?"

Again, Aggie shook her head in perplexity.

"His old man sends you up for a stretch for something you didn't do—and you take up with his son like——"

"And yet you don't understand!" There was scorn for such gross stupidity in the musical voice.

Aggie choked a little from the cigarette smoke, as she gave a gasp when suspicion of the truth suddenly dawned on her slow intelligence.

"My Gawd!" Her voice came in a treble shriek of apprehension. "I'm wise!"

"But you must understand this," Mary went on, with an authoritative note in her voice. "Whatever may be between young Gilder and me is to be strictly my own affair. It has absolutely nothing to do with the rest of you, or with our schemes for money-making. And, what is more, Agnes, I don't want to talk about it. But——"

"Yes?" queried Aggie, encouragingly, as the other paused. She hopefully awaited further confidences.

"But I do want to know," Mary continued with some severity, "what you meant by talking in the public street yesterday with a common pickpocket."

Aggie's childlike face changed swiftly its expression from a sly eagerness to sullenness.

"You know perfectly well, Mary Turner," she cried indignantly, "that I only said a few words in passin' to my brother Jim. And he ain't no common pickpocket. Hully Gee! He's the best dip in the business."

"But you must not be seen speaking with him," Mary directed, with a certain air of command now become habitual to her among the members of her clique. "My cousin, Miss Agnes Lynch, must be very careful as to her associates."

The volatile Agnes was restored to good humor by some subtle quality in the utterance, and a family pride asserted itself.

"He just stopped me to say it's been the best year he ever had," she explained, with ostentatious vanity.

Mary appeared sceptical.

"How can that be," she demanded, "when the dead line now is John Street?"

"The dead line!" Aggie scoffed. A peal of laughter rang merrily from her curving lips.

"Why, Jim takes lunch every day in the Wall Street Delmonico's. Yes," she went on with increasing animation, "and only yesterday he went down to Police Headquarters, just for a little excitement, 'cause Jim does sure hate a dull life. Say, he told me they've got a mat at the door with 'Welcome' on it—in letters three feet high. Now, what—do—you—think—of that!" Aggie teetered joyously, the while she inhaled a shockingly large mouthful of smoke. "And, oh, yes!" she continued happily, "Jim, he lifted a leather from a bull who was standing in the hallway there at Headquarters! Jim sure does love excitement."

Mary lifted her dark eyebrows in half-amused inquiry.

"It's no use, Agnes," she declared, though without entire sincerity; "I can't quite keep up with your thieves' *argot*—your slang, you know. Just what did this brother of yours do?"

"Why, he copped the copper's kale," Aggie translated, glibly.

Mary threw out her hands in a gesture of dismay.

Thereupon, the adventuress instantly assumed a most ladylike and mincing air which ill assorted with the cigarette that she held between her lips.

"He gently removed a leathern wallet," she said sedately, "containing a large sum of money from the coat-

pocket of a member of the detective force." The elegance of utterance was inimitably done. But in the next instant, the ordinary vulgarity of enunciation was in full play again. "Oh, Gee!" she cried gaily. "He says Inspector Burke's got a gold watch that weighs a ton, an' all set with diamon's!—which was give to 'im by—admirin' friends! . . . We didn't contribute."

"Given to him," Mary corrected, with a tolerant smile.

Aggie sniffed once again.

"What difference does it make?" she demanded, scornfully. "He's got it, ain't he?" And then she added with avaricious intensity: "Just as soon as I get time, I'm goin' after that watch—believe me!"

Mary shook her head in denial.

"No, you are not," she said, calmly. "You are under my orders now. And as long as you are working with us, you will break no laws."

"But I can't see——" Aggie began to argue with the petulance of a spoiled child.

Mary's voice came with a certainty of conviction born of fact.

"When you were working alone," she said gravely, "did you have a home like this?"

"No," was the answer, spoken a little rebelliously.

"Or such clothes? Most of all, did you have safety from the police?"

"No," Aggie admitted, somewhat more responsively. "But, just the same, I can't see——"

Mary began putting on her gloves, and at the same

time strove to give this remarkable young woman some insight into her own point of view, though she knew the task to be one well-nigh impossible.

"Agnes," she said, didactically, "the richest men in this country have made their fortunes, not because of the law, but in spite of the law. They made up their minds what they wanted to do, and then they engaged lawyers clever enough to show them how they could do it, and still keep within the law. Any one with brains can get rich in this country if he will engage the right lawyer. Well, I have the brains—and Harris is showing me the law—the wonderful twisted law that was made for the rich! Since we keep inside the law, we are safe."

Aggie, without much apprehension of the exact situation, was moved to a dimpled mirth over the essential humor of the method indicated.

"Gee, that's funny," she cried happily. "You an' me an' Joe Garson handin' it to 'em, an' the bulls can't touch us! Next thing you know, Harris will be havin' us incorporated as the American Legal Crime Society."

"I shouldn't be in the least surprised," Mary assented, as she finished buttoning her gloves. She smiled, but there was a hint of grimness in the bending of her lips. That grimness remained, as she glanced at the clock, then went toward the door of the room, speaking over her shoulder.

"And, now I must be off to a most important engagement with Mr. Dick Gilder."

CHAPTER VIII.

A TIP FROM HEADQUARTERS.

Presently, when she had finished the cigarette, Aggie proceeded to her own chamber and there spent a considerable time in making a toilette calculated to set off to its full advantage the slender daintiness of her form. When at last she was gowned to her satisfaction, she went into the drawing-room of the apartment and gave herself over to more cigarettes, in an easy chair, sprawled out in an attitude of comfort never taught in any finishing school for young ladies. She at the same time indulged her tastes in art and literature by reading the jokes and studying the comic pictures in an evening paper, which the maid brought in at her request. She had about exhausted this form of amusement when the coming of Joe Garson, who was usually in and out of the apartment a number of times daily, provided a welcome diversion. After a casual greeting between the two, Aggie explained, in response to his question, that Mary had gone out to keep an engagement with Dick Gilder.

There was a little period of silence while the man, with the resolute face and the light gray eyes that shone so clearly underneath the thick, waving silver hair, held his head bent downward as if in intent thought. When,

certain quality in his voice
him curiously.
good deal lately," he said,

rt agreement.

"Why?" Aggie demanded, in surprise.

Garson's manner grew easier, now that the subject was well broached.

"Old man Gilder's got a big pull," he vouchsafed, "and if he caught on to his boy's going with Mary, he'd be likely to send the police after us—strong! Believe me, I ain't looking for any trip up the river."

Aggie shook her head, quite unaffected by the man's suggestion of possible peril in the situation.

"We ain't done nothin' they can touch us for," she declared, with assurance. "Mary says so."

Garson, however, was unconvinced, notwithstanding his deference to the judgment of his leader.

"Whether we've done anything, or whether we haven't, don't matter," he objected. "Once the police set out after you, they'll get you. Russia ain't in it with some of the things I have seen pulled off in this town."

"Oh, can that 'fraid talk!" Aggie exclaimed, roughly. "I tell you they can't get us. We've got our fingers crossed."

She would have said more, but a noise at the hall door interrupted her, and she looked up to see a man in the opening, while behind him appeared the maid, protesting angrily.

"Never mind that announcing thing with me," the newcomer rasped to the expostulating servant, in a voice that suited well his thick-set figure, with the bullet-shaped head and the bull-like neck. Then he turned to the two in the drawing-room, both of whom had now risen to their feet.

"It's all right," Fannie," Aggie said hastily to the flustered maid. "You can go."

As the servant, after an indignant toss of the head, departed along the passage, the visitor clumped heavily forward and stopped in the center of the room, looking first at one and then the other of the two with a smile that was not pleasant. He was not at pains to remove the derby hat which he wore rather far back on his head. By this single sign, one might have recognized Cassidy, who had had Mary Turner in his charge on the occasion of her ill-fated visit to Edward Gilder's office, four years before, though now the man had thickened somewhat, and his ruddy face was grown even coarser.

"Hello, Joe!" he cried, familiarly. "Hello, Aggie!"

The light-gray eyes of the forger had narrowed perceptibly as he recognized the identity of the unceremonious caller, while the lines of his firmly set mouth took on an added fixity.

"Well?" he demanded. His voice was emotionless.

"Just a little friendly call," Cassidy announced, in his strident voice. "Where's the lady of the house?"

"Out." It was Aggie who spoke, very sharply.

"Well, Joe," Cassidy went on, without paying further heed to the girl for a moment, "when she comes back, just tell her it's up to her to make a get-away, and to make it quick."

But Aggie was not one to be ignored under any circumstances. Now, she spoke with some acerbity in her voice, which could at will be wondrous soft and low.

"Say!" she retorted viciously, "you can't throw any scare into us. You hain't got anything on us. See?"

Cassidy, in response to this outburst, favored the girl with a long stare, and there was hearty amusement in his tones as he answered.

"Nothing on you, eh? Well, well, let's see." He regarded Garson with a grin. "You are Joe Garson, forger." As he spoke, the detective took a note-book from a pocket, found a page, and then read: "First arrested in 1891, for forging the name of Edwin Goodsell to a check for ten thousand dollars. Again arrested June 19, 1893, for forgery. Arrested in April, 1898, for forging the signature of Oscar Hemmenway to a series of bonds that were counterfeit. Arrested as the man back of the Reilly gang, in 1903. Arrested in 1908 for forgery."

There was no change in the face or pose of the man who listened to the reading. When it was done, and the officer looked up with a resumption of his triumphant grin, Garson spoke quietly.

"Haven't any records of convictions, have you?"

The grin died, and a snarl sprang in its stead.

"No," he snapped, vindictively. "But we've got the right dope on you, all right, Joe Garson." He turned savagely on the girl, who now had regained her usual expression of demure innocence, but with her rather too heavy brows drawn a little lower than their wont, under the influence of an emotion otherwise concealed.

"And you're little Aggie Lynch," Cassidy declared, as he thrust the note-book back into his pocket. "Just

now, you're posing as Mary Turner's cousin. You served two years in Burnsing for blackmail. You were arrested in Buffalo, convicted, and served your stretch. Nothing on you? Well, well!" Again there was triumph in the officer's chuckle.

Aggie showed no least sign of perturbation in the face of this revelation of her unsavory record. Only an expression of half-incredulous wonder and delight beamed from her widely opened blue eyes and was emphasized in the rounding of the little mouth.

"Why," she cried, and now there was softness enough in the cooing notes, "my Gawd! It looks as though you had actually been workin'!"

The sarcasm was without effect on the dull sensibilities of the officer. He went on speaking with obvious enjoyment of the extent to which his knowledge reached.

"And the head of the gang is Mary Turner. Arrested four years ago for robbing the Emporium. Did her stretch of three years."

"Is that all you've got about her?" Garson demanded, with such abruptness that Cassidy forgot his dignity sufficiently to answer with an unqualified yes.

The forger continued speaking rapidly, and now there was an undercurrent of feeling in his voice.

"Nothing in your record of her about her coming out without a friend in the world, and trying to go straight? You ain't got nothing in that pretty little book of your'n about your going to the millinery store where she finally got a job, and tipping them off to where she come from?"

"Sure, they was tipped off," Cassidy answered, quite unmoved. And he added, swelling visibly with importance: "We got to protect the city."

"Got anything in that record of your'n," Garson went on venomously, "about her getting another job, and your following her up again, and having her thrown out? Got it there about the letter you had old Gilder write, so that his influence would get her canned?"

"Oh, we had her right the first time," Cassidy admitted, complacently.

Then, the bitterness of Garson's soul was revealed by the fierceness in his voice as he replied.

"You did not! She was railroaded for a job she never done. She went in honest, and she came out honest."

The detective indulged himself in a cackle of sneering merriment.

"And that's why she's here now with a gang of crooks," he retorted.

Garson met the implication fairly.

"Where else should she be?" he demanded, violently. "You ain't got nothing in that record about my jumping into the river after her?" The forger's voice deepened and trembled with the intensity of his emotion, which was now grown so strong that any who listened and looked might guess something of the truth as to his feeling toward this woman of whom he spoke. "That's where I found her—a girl that never done nobody any harm, starving because you police wouldn't give her a chance to work. In the river because she wouldn't take

the only other way that was left her to make a living, because she was keeping straight! . . . Have you got any of that in your book?"

Cassidy, who had been scowling in the face of this arraignment, suddenly gave vent to a croaking laugh of derision.

"Huh!" he said, contemptuously. "I guess you're stuck on her, eh?"

At the words, an instantaneous change swept over Garson. Hitherto, he had been tense, his face set with emotion, a man strong and sullen, with eyes as clear and heartless as those of a beast in the wild. Now, without warning, a startling transformation was wrought. His form stiffened to rigidity after one lightning-swift step forward, and his face grayed. The eyes glowed with the fires of a man's heart in a spasm of hate. He was the embodiment of rage, as he spoke huskily, his voice a whisper that was yet louder than any shout.

"Cut that!"

The eyes of the two men locked. Cassidy struggled with all his pride against the dominant fury this man hurled on him.

"What?" he demanded, blusteringly. But his tone was weaker than its wont.

"I mean," Garson repeated, and there was finality in his accents, a deadly quality that was appalling, "I mean, cut it out—now, here, and all the time! It don't go!" The voice rose slightly. The effect of it was more penetrant than a scream. "It don't go! . . . Do you get me?"

There was a short interval of silence, then the officer's eyes at last fell. It was Aggie who relieved the tension of the scene.

"He's got you," she remarked, airily. "Oi, oi! He's got you!"

There were again a few seconds of pause, and then Cassidy made an observation that revealed in some measure the shock of the experience he had just undergone.

"You would have been a big man, Joe, if it hadn't been for that temper of yours. It's got you into trouble once or twice already. Some time it's likely to prove your finish."

Garson relaxed his immobility, and a little color crept into his cheeks.

"That's my business," he responded, dully.

"Anyway," the officer went on, with a new confidence, now that his eyes were free from the gaze that had burned into his soul, "you've got to clear out, the whole gang of you—and do it quick."

Aggie, who as a matter of fact began to feel that she was not receiving her due share of attention, now interposed, moving forward till her face was close to the detective's.

"We don't scare worth a cent," she snapped, with the virulence of a vixen. "You can't do anything to us. We ain't broke the law." There came a sudden ripple of laughter, and the charming lips curved joyously, as she added: "Though perhaps we have bent it a bit."

Cassidy sneered, outraged by such impudence on the part of an ex-convict.

"Don't make no difference what you've done," he growled. "Gee!" he went on, with a heavy sneer. "But things are coming to a pretty pass when a gang of crooks gets to arguing about their rights. That's funny, that is!"

"Then laugh!" Aggie exclaimed, insolently, and made a face at the officer. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, you've got the tip," Cassidy returned, somewhat disconcerted, after a stolid fashion of his own. "It's up to you to take it, that's all. If you don't, one of you will make a long visit with some people out of town, and it'll probably be Mary. Remember, I'm giving it to you straight."

Aggie assumed her formal society manner, exaggerated to the point of extravagance.

"Do come again, little one," she chirruped, caressingly. "I've enjoyed your visit so much!"

But Cassidy paid no apparent attention to her frivolousness; only turned and went noisily out of the drawing-room, offering no return to her daintily inflected good-afternoon.

For her own part, as she heard the outer door close behind the detective, Aggie's expression grew vicious, and the heavy brows drew very low, until the level line almost made her prettiness vanish.

"The truck-horse detective!" she sneered. "An eighteen collar, and a six-and-a-half hat! He sure had his nerve, trying to bluff us!"

But it was plain that Garson was of another mood. There was anxiety in his face, as he stood staring vaguely out of the window.

"Perhaps it wasn't a bluff, Aggie," he suggested.

"Well, what have we done, I'd like to know?" the girl demanded, confidently. She took a cigarette and a match from the tabouret beside her, and stretched her feet comfortably, if very inelegantly, on a chair opposite.

Garson answered with a note of weariness that was unlike him.

"It ain't what you have done," he said, quietly. "It's what they can make a jury think you've done. And, once they set out to get you—God, how they can frame things! If they ever start out after Mary——" He did not finish the sentence, but sank down into his chair with a groan that was almost of despair.

The girl replied with a burst of careless laughter.

"Joe," she said gaily, "you're one grand little forger, all right, all right. But Mary's got the brains. Pooh, I'll string along with her as far as she wants to go. She's educated, she is. She ain't like you and me, Joe. She talks like a lady, and, what's a damned sight harder, she acts like a lady. I guess I know. Wake me up any old night and ask me—just ask me, that's all. She's been tryin' to make a lady out of me!"

The vivaciousness of the girl distracted the man for the moment from the gloom of his thoughts, and he turned to survey the speaker with a cynical amusement.

"Swell chance!" he commented, drily.

"Oh, I'm not so worse! Just you watch out." The lively girl sprang up, discarded the cigarette, adjusted an imaginary train, and spoke lispingly in a society manner much more moderate and convincing than that with which she had favored the retiring Cassidy. Voice, pose and gesture proclaimed at least the excellent mimic.

"How do you do, Mrs. Jones! So good of you to call! . . . My dear Miss Smith, this is indeed a pleasure." She seated herself again, quite primly now, and moved her hands over the tabouret appropriately to her words. "One lump, or two? . . . Yes, I just love bridge. No, I don't play," she continued, simpering; "but, just the same, I love it." With this absurd ending, Aggie again arranged her feet according to her liking on the opposite chair. "That's the kind of stuff she's had me doing," she rattled on in her coarser voice, "and believe me, Joe, it's damned near killing me. But all the same," she hurried on, with a swift revulsion of mood to the former serious topic, "I'm for Mary strong! You stick to her, Joe, and you'll wear diamon's. . . . And that reminds me! I wish she'd let me wear mine, but she won't. She says they're vulgar for an innocent country girl like her cousin, Agnes Lynch. Ain't that fierce? . . . How can anything be vulgar that's worth a hundred and fifty a carat?"

CHAPTER IX.

A LEGAL DOCUMENT.

Mary Turner spent less than an hour in that mysteriously important engagement with Dick Gilder, of which she had spoken to Aggie. After separating from the young man, she went alone down Broadway, walking the few blocks of distance to Sigismund Harris's office. On a corner, her attention was caught by the forlorn face of a girl crossing into the side street. A closer glance showed that the privation of the gaunt features was emphasized by the scant garments, almost in tatters. Instantly, Mary's quick sympathies were aroused, the more particularly since the wretched child seemed of about the age she herself had been when her great suffering had befallen. So, turning aside, she soon caught up with the girl and spoke an inquiry.

It was the familiar story, a father out of work, a sick mother, a brood of hungry children. Some confused words of distress revealed the fact that the wobegone girl was even then fighting the final battle of purity against starvation. That she still fought on in such case proved enough as to her decency of nature, wholesome despite squalid surroundings. Mary's heart was deeply moved, and her words of comfort came with a simple sincerity that was like new life to the sorely beset

waif. She promised to interest herself in securing employment for the father, such care as the mother and children might need, along with a proper situation for the girl herself. In evidence of her purpose, she took her engagement-book from her bag, and set down the street and number of the East Side tenement where the family possessed the one room that mocked the word home, and she gave a banknote to the girl to serve the immediate needs.

When she went back to resume her progress down Broadway, Mary felt herself vastly cheered by the warm glow within, which is the reward of a kindly act, gratefully received. And, on this particular morning, she craved such assuagement of her spirit, for the conscience that, in spite of all her misdeeds, still lived was struggling within her. In her revolt against a world that had wantonly inflicted on her the worst torments, Mary Turner had thought that she might safely disregard those principles in which she had been so carefully reared. She had believed that by the deliberate adoption of a life of guile within limits allowed by the law, she would find solace for her wants, while feeling that thus she avenged herself in some slight measure for the indignities she had undergone unjustly. Yet, as the days passed, days of success as far as her scheming was concerned, this brilliant woman, who had tried to deem herself unscrupulous, found that lawlessness within the law failed to satisfy something deep within her soul. The righteousness that was her instinct was offended by the triumphs achieved through so devious

devices, though she resolutely set her will to suppress any spiritual rebellion.

There was, as well, another grievance of her nature, yet more subtle, infinitely more painful. This lay in her craving for tenderness. She was wholly woman, notwithstanding the virility of her intelligence, its audacity, its aggressiveness. She had a heart yearning for the multitudinous affections that are the prerogative of the feminine; she had a heart longing for love, to receive and to give in full measure. . . . And her life was barren. Since the death of her father, there had been none on whom she could lavish the great gifts of her tenderness. Through the days of her working in the store, circumstances had shut her out from all association with others congenial. No need to rehearse the impossibilities of companionship in the prison life. Since then, the situation had not vitally improved, in spite of her better worldly condition. For Garson, who had saved her from death, she felt a strong and lasting gratitude—nothing that relieved the longing for nobler affections. There was none other with whom she had any intimacy except that, of a sort, with Aggie Lynch, and by no possibility could the adventuress serve as an object of deep regard. The girl was amusing enough, and, indeed, a most likable person at her best. But she was, after all, a shallow-pated individual, without a shred of principle of any sort whatsoever, save the single merit of unswerving loyalty to her "pals." Mary cherished a certain warm kindliness for the first woman

who had befriended her in any way, but beyond this there was no finer feeling.

Nevertheless, it is not quite accurate to say that Mary Turner had had no intimacy in which her heart might have been seriously engaged. In one instance, of recent happening, she had been much in association with a young man who was of excellent standing in the world, who was of good birth, good education, of delightful manners, and, too, wholesome and agreeable beyond the most of his class. This was Dick Gilder, and, since her companionship with him, Mary had undergone a revulsion greater than ever before against the fate thrust on her, which now at last she had chosen to welcome and nourish by acquiescence as best she might.

Of course, she could not waste tenderness on this man, for she had deliberately set out to make him the instrument of her vengeance against his father. For that very reason, she suffered much from a conscience newly clamorous. Never for an instant did she hesitate in her long-cherished plan of revenge against the one who had brought ruin on her life, yet, through all her satisfaction before the prospect of final victory after continued delay, there ran the secret, inescapable sorrow over the fact that she must employ this means to attain her end. She had no thought of weakening, but the better spirit within her warred against the lust to repay an eye for an eye. It was the new Gospel against the old Law, and the fierceness of the struggle rent her. Just now, the doing of the kindly act seemed somehow to gratify not only her maternal instinct toward service

of love, but, too, to muffle for a little the rebuking voice of her inmost soul.

So she went her way more at ease, more nearly content again with herself and with her system of living. Indeed, as she was shown into the private office of the ingenious interpreter of the law, there was not a hint of any trouble beneath the bright mask of her beauty, radiantly smiling.

Harris regarded his client with an appreciative eye, as he bowed in greeting, and invited her to a seat. The lawyer was a man of fine physique, with a splendid face of the best Semitic type, in which were large, dark, sparkling eyes—eyes a Lombroso perhaps might have judged rather too closely set. As a matter of fact, Harris had suffered a flagrant injustice in his own life from a suspicion of wrong-doing which he had not merited by any act. This had caused him a loss of prestige in his profession. He presently adopted the wily suggestion of the adage, that it is well to have the game if you have the name, and he resolutely set himself to the task of making as much money as possible by any means convenient. Mary Turner as a client delighted his heart, both because of the novelty of her ideas and for the munificence of the fees which she ungrudgingly paid with never a protest. So, as he beamed on her now, and spoke a compliment, it was rather the lawyer than the man that was moved to admiration.

"Why, Miss Turner, how charming!" he declared, smiling. "Really, my dear young lady, you look positively bridal."

"Oh, do you think so?" Mary rejoined, with a whimsical pout, as she seated herself. For the moment her air became distrait, but she quickly regained her poise, as the lawyer, who had dropped back into his chair behind the desk, went on speaking. His tone now was crisply business-like.

"I sent your cousin, Miss Agnes Lynch, the release which she is to sign," he explained, "when she gets that money from General Hastings. I wish you'd look it over, when you have time to spare. It's all right, I'm sure, but I confess that I appreciate your opinion of things, Miss Turner, even of legal documents—yes, indeed, I do!—perhaps particularly of legal documents."

"Thank you," Mary said, evidently a little gratified by the frank praise of the learned gentleman for her abilities. "And have you heard from them yet?" she inquired.

"No," the lawyer replied. "I gave them until tomorrow. If I don't hear then, I shall start suit at once." Then the lawyer's manner became unusually bland and self-satisfied as he opened a drawer of the desk and brought forth a rather formidable-appearing document, bearing a most impressive seal. "You will be glad to know," he went on unctuously, "that I was entirely successful in carrying out that idea of yours as to the injunction. My dear Miss Turner," he went on with florid compliment, "Portia was a squawking baby, compared with you."

"Thank you again," Mary answered, as she took the legal paper which he held outstretched toward her.

Her scarlet lips were curved happily, and the clear oval of her cheeks blossomed to a deeper rose. For a moment, her glance ran over the words of the page. Then she looked up at the lawyer, and there were new lusters in the violet eyes.

"It's splendid," she declared. "Did you have much trouble in getting it?"

Harris permitted himself the indulgence of an unprofessional chuckle of keenest amusement before he answered.

"Why, no!" he declared, with reminiscent enjoyment in his manner. "That is, not really!" There was an enormous complacency in his air over the event. "But, at the outset, when I made the request, the judge just naturally nearly fell off the bench. Then, I showed him that Detroit case, to which you had drawn my attention, and the upshot of it all was that he gave me what I wanted without a whimper. He couldn't help himself, you know. That's the long and the short of it."

That mysterious document with the imposing seal, the request for which had nearly caused a judge to fall off the bench, reposed safely in Mary's bag when she returned to the apartment after the visit to the lawyer's office.

CHAPTER X.

MARKED MONEY.

Mary had scarcely received from Aggie an account of Cassidy's threatening invasion, when the maid announced that Mr. Irwin had called.

"Show him in, in just two minutes," Mary directed.

"Who's the gink?" Aggie demanded, with that slangy diction which was her habit.

"You ought to know," Mary returned, smiling a little. "He's the lawyer retained by General Hastings in the matter of a certain breach-of-promise suit."

"Oh, you mean yours truly," Aggie exclaimed, not in the least abashed by her forgetfulness in an affair that concerned herself so closely. "Hope he's brought the money. What about it?"

"Leave the room now," Mary ordered, crisply. "When I call to you, come in, but be sure and leave everything to me. Merely follow my lead. And, Agnes—be very *ingénue.*"

"Oh, I'm wise—I'm wise," Aggie nodded, as she hurried out toward her bedroom. "I'll be a squab—surest thing you know!"

Next moment, Mary gave a formal greeting to the lawyer who represented the man she planned to mulct effectively, and invited him to a chair near her, while

she herself retained her place at the desk, within a drawer of which she had just locked the formidable-appearing document received from Harris.

Irwin lost no time in coming to the point.

"I called in reference to this suit, which Miss Agnes Lynch threatens to bring against my client, General Hastings."

Mary regarded the attorney with a level glance, serenely expressionless as far as could be achieved by eyes so clear and shining, and her voice was cold as she replied with significant brusqueness.

"It's not a threat, Mr. Irwin. The suit will be brought."

The lawyer frowned, and there was a strident note in his voice when he answered, meeting her glance with an uncompromising stare of hostility.

"You realize, of course," he said finally, "that this is merely plain blackmail."

There was not the change of a feature in the face of the woman who listened to the accusation. Her eyes steadfastly retained their clear gaze into his; her voice was still coldly formal, as before.

"If it's blackmail, Mr. Irwin, why don't you consult the police?" she inquired, with manifest disdain. Mary turned to the maid, who now entered in response to the bell she had sounded a minute before. "Fanny, will you ask Miss Lynch to come in, please?" Then she faced the lawyer again, with an aloofness of manner that was contemptuous. "Really, Mr. Irwin," she drawled, "why don't you take this matter to the police?"

The reply was uttered with conspicuous exasperation.

"You know perfectly well," the lawyer said bitterly, "that General Hastings cannot afford such publicity. His position would be jeopardized."

"Oh, as for that," Mary suggested evenly, and now there was a trace of flippancy in her fashion of speaking, "I'm sure the police would keep your complaint a secret. Really, you know, Mr. Irwin, I think you had better take your troubles to the police, rather than to me. You will get much more sympathy from them."

The lawyer sprang up, with an air of sudden determination.

"Very well, I will then," he declared, sternly. "I will!"

Mary, from her vantage point at the desk across from him, smiled a smile that would have been very engaging to any man under more favorable circumstances, and she pushed in his direction the telephone that stood there.

"3100, Spring," she remarked, encouragingly, "will bring an officer almost immediately." She leaned back in her chair, and surveyed the baffled man amusedly.

The lawyer was furious over the failure of his effort to intimidate this extraordinarily self-possessed young woman, who made a mock of his every thrust. But he was by no means at the end of his resources.

"Nevertheless," he rejoined, "you know perfectly well that General Hastings never promised to marry this girl. You know——" He broke off as Aggie entered the drawing-room.

Now, the girl was demure in seeming almost beyond belief, a childish creature, very fair and dainty, guileless surely, with those untroubled eyes of blue, those softly curving lips of warmest red and the more delicate bloom in the rounded cheeks. There were the charms of innocence and simplicity in the manner of her as she stopped just within the doorway, whence she regarded Mary with a timid, pleading gaze, her slender little form poised lightly as if for flight.

"Did you want me, dear?" she asked. There was something half-plaintive in the modulated cadences of the query.

"Agnes," Mary answered affectionately, "this is Mr. Irwin, who has come to see you in behalf of General Hastings."

"Oh!" the girl murmured, her voice quivering a little, as the lawyer, after a short nod, dropped again into his seat; "oh, I'm so frightened!" She hurried, fluttering, to a low stool behind the desk, beside Mary's chair, and there she sank down, drooping slightly, and catching hold of one of Mary's hands as if in mute pleading for protection against the fear that beset her chaste soul.

"Nonsense!" Mary exclaimed, soothingly. "There's really nothing at all to be frightened about, my dear child." Her voice was that with which one seeks to cajole a terrified infant. "You mustn't be afraid, Agnes. Mr. Irwin says that General Hastings did not promise to marry you. Of course, you understand, my dear, that under no circumstances must you say anything that isn't

strictly true, and that, if he did not promise to marry you, you have no case—none at all. Now, Agnes, tell me: did General Hastings promise to marry you?"

"Oh, yes—oh, yes, indeed!" Aggie cried, falteringly. "And I wish he would. He's such a delightful old gentleman!" As she spoke, the girl let go Mary's hand and clasped her own together ecstatically.

The legal representative of the delightful old gentleman scowled disgustedly at this outburst. His voice was portentous, as he put a question.

"Was that promise made in writing?"

"No," Aggie answered, gushingly. "But all his letters were in writing, you know. Such wonderful letters!" She raised her blue eyes toward the ceiling in a naïve rapture. "So tender, and so—er—interesting!" Somehow, the inflection on the last word did not altogether suggest the ingenuous.

"Yes, yes, I dare say," Irwin agreed, hastily, with some evidences of chagrin. He had no intention of dwelling on that feature of the letters, concerning which he had no doubt whatsoever, since he knew the amorous General very well indeed. They would be interesting, beyond shadow of questioning, horribly interesting. Such was the confessed opinion of the swain himself who had written them in his folly—horribly interesting to all the reading public of the country, since the General was a conspicuous figure.

Mary intervened with a suavity that infuriated the lawyer almost beyond endurance.

"But you're quite sure, Agnes," she questioned gently,

"that General Hastings did promise to marry you?" The candor of her manner was perfect.

And the answer of Aggie was given with a like convincing emphasis.

"Oh, yes!" she declared, tensely. "Why, I would swear to it." The limpid eyes, so appealing in their soft lusters, went first to Mary, then gazed trustingly into those of the routed attorney.

"You see, Mr. Irwin, she would swear to that," emphasized Mary.

"We're beaten," he confessed, dejectedly, turning his glance toward Mary, whom, plainly, he regarded as his real adversary in the combat on his client's behalf. "I'm going to be quite frank with you, Miss Turner, quite frank," he stated with more geniality, though with a very crestfallen air. Somehow, indeed, there was just a shade too much of the crestfallen in the fashion of his utterance, and the woman whom he addressed watched warily as he continued. "We can't afford any scandal, so we're going to settle at your own terms." He paused expectantly, but Mary offered no comment; only maintained her alert scrutiny of the man. The lawyer, therefore, leaned forward with a semblance of frank eagerness. Instantly, Aggie had become agog with greedily blissful anticipations, and she uttered a slight ejaculation of joy; but Irwin paid no heed to her. He was occupied in taking from his pocket a thick bill-case, and from this presently a sheaf of banknotes, which he laid on the desk before Mary, with a little

laugh of discomfiture over having been beaten in the contest.

As he did so, Aggie thrust forth an avaricious hand, but it was caught and held by Mary before it reached above the top of the desk, and the avaricious gesture passed unobserved by the attorney.

"We can't fight where ladies are concerned," he went on, assuming, as best he might contrive, a chivalrous tone. "So, if you will just hand over General Hastings' letters, why, here's your money."

Much to the speaker's surprise, there followed an interval of silence, and his puzzlement showed in the knitting of his brows. "You have the letters, haven't you?" he demanded, abruptly.

Aggie coyly took a thick bundle from its resting place on her rounded bosom.

"They never leave me," she murmured, with dulcet passion. There was in her voice a suggestion of desolation—a desolation that was the blighting effect of letting the cherished missives go from her.

"Well, they can leave you now, all right," the lawyer remarked unsympathetically, but with returning cheerfulness, since he saw the end of his quest in visible form before him. He reached quickly forward for the packet, which Aggie extended willingly enough. But it was Mary who, with a swift movement, caught and held it.

"Not quite yet, Mr. Irwin, I'm afraid," she said, calmly.

The lawyer barely suppressed a violent ejaculation of annoyance.

"But there's the money waiting for you," he protested, indignantly.

The rejoinder from Mary was spoken with great deliberation, yet with a note of determination that caused a quick and acute anxiety to the General's representative.

"I think," Mary explained tranquilly, "that you had better see our lawyer, Mr. Harris, in reference to this. We women know nothing of such details of business settlement."

"Oh, there's no need for all that formality," Irwin urged, with a great appearance of bland friendliness.

"Just the same," Mary persisted, unimpressed, "I'm quite sure you would better see Mr. Harris first." There was a cadence of insistence in her voice that assured the lawyer as to the futility of further pretense on his part.

"Oh, I see," he said disagreeably, with a frown to indicate his complete sagacity in the premises.

"I thought you would, Mr. Irwin," Mary returned, and now she smiled in a kindly manner, which, nevertheless, gave no pleasure to the chagrined man before her. As he rose, she went on crisply: "If you'll take the money to Mr. Harris, Miss Lynch will meet you in his office at four o'clock this afternoon, and, when her suit for damages for breach of promise has been legally settled out of court, you will get the letters. . . . Good-afternoon, Mr. Irwin."

The lawyer made a hurried bow which took in both of the women, and walked quickly toward the door. But he was arrested before he reached it by the voice of Mary, speaking again, still in that imperturbable evenness which so rasped his nerves, for all its mellow resonance. But this time there was a sting, of the sharpest, in the words themselves.

"Oh, you forgot your marked money, Mr. Irwin," Mary said.

The lawyer wheeled, and stood staring at the speaker with a certain sheepishness of expression that bore witness to the completeness of his discomfiture. Without a word, after a long moment in which he perceived intently the delicate, yet subtly energetic, loveliness of this slender woman, he walked back to the desk, picked up the money, and restored it to the bill-case. This done, at last he spoke, with a new respect in his voice, a quizzical smile on his rather thin lips.

"Young woman," he said emphatically, "you ought to have been a lawyer." And with that laudatory confession of her skill, he finally took his departure, while Mary smiled in a triumph she was at no pains to conceal, and Aggie sat gaping astonishment over the surprising turn of events.

It was the latter volatile person who ended the silence that followed on the lawyer's going.

"You've darn near broke my heart," she cried, bouncing up violently, "letting all that money go out of the house. . . . Say, how did you know it was marked?"

"I didn't," Mary replied, blandly; "but it was a

pretty good guess, wasn't it? Couldn't you see that all he wanted was to get the letters, and have us take the marked money? Then, my simple young friend, we would have been arrested very neatly indeed—for blackmail."

Aggie's innocent eyes rounded in an amazed consternation, which was not at all assumed.

"Gee!" she cried. "That would have been fierce! And now?" she questioned, apprehensively.

Mary's answer repudiated any possibility of fear.

"And now," she explained contentedly, "he really will go to our lawyer. There, he will pay over that same marked money. Then, he will get the letters he wants so much. And, just because it's a strictly business transaction between two lawyers, with everything done according to legal ethics——"

"What's legal ethics?" Aggie demanded, impetuously. "They sound some tasty!" With the comment, she dropped weakly into a chair.

Mary laughed in care-free enjoyment, as well she might after winning the victory in such a battle of wits.

"Oh," she said, happily, "you just get it legally, and you get twice as much!"

"And it's actually the same old game!" Aggie mused. She was doing her best to get a clear understanding of the matter, though to her it was all a mystery most esoteric.

Mary reviewed the case succinctly for the other's enlightenment.

"Yes, it's the same game precisely," she affirmed.

"A shameless old roué makes love to you, and he writes you a stack of silly letters."

The pouting lips of the listener took on a pathetic droop, and her voice quivered as she spoke with an effective semblance of virginal terror.

"He might have ruined my life!"

Mary continued without giving much attention to these histrionics.

"If you had asked him for all this money for the return of his letters, it would have been blackmail, and we'd have gone to jail in all human probability. But we did no such thing—no, indeed! What we did wasn't anything like that in the eyes of the law. What we did was merely to have your lawyer take steps toward a suit for damages for breach of promise of marriage for the sum of ten thousand dollars. Then, his lawyer appears in behalf of General Hastings, and there follow a number of conferences between the legal representatives of the opposing parties. By means of these conferences, the two legal gentlemen run up very respectable bills of expenses. In the end, we get our ten thousand dollars, and the flighty old General gets back his letters. . . . My dear," Mary concluded vainglorioously, "we're inside the law, and so we're perfectly safe. And there you are!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE THIEF.

Mary remained in joyous spirits after her victorious matching of brains against a lawyer of high standing in his profession. For the time being, conscience was muted by gratified ambition. Her thoughts just then were far from the miseries of the past, with their evil train of consequences in the present. But that past was soon to be recalled to her with a vividness most terrible.

She had entered the telephone-booth, which she had caused to be installed out of an extra closet of her bedroom for the sake of greater privacy on occasion, and it was during her absence from the drawing-room that Garson again came into the apartment, seeking her. On being told by Aggie as to Mary's whereabouts, he sat down to await her return, listening without much interest to the chatter of the adventuress. . . . It was just then that the maid appeared.

"There's a girl wants to see Miss Turner," she explained.

The irrepressible Aggie put on her most finically elegant air.

"Has she a card?" she inquired haughtily, while the maid tittered appreciation.

"No," was the answer. "But she says it's important. I guess the poor thing's in hard luck, from the look of her," the kindly Fannie added.

"Oh, then she'll be welcome, of course," Aggie declared, and Garson nodded in acquiescence. "Tell her to come in and wait, Fannie. Miss Turner will be here right away." She turned to Garson as the maid left the room. "Mary sure is an easy boob," she remarked, cheerfully. "Bless her soft heart!"

A curiously gentle smile of appreciation softened the immobility of the forger's face as he again nodded assent.

"We might just as well pipe off the skirt before Mary gets here," Aggie suggested, with eagerness.

A minute later, a girl perhaps twenty years of age stepped just within the doorway, and stood there with eyes downcast, after one swift, furtive glance about her. Her whole appearance was that of dejection. Her soiled black gown, the cringing posture, the pallor of her face, proclaimed the abject misery of her state.

Aggie, who was not exuberant in her sympathies for any one other than herself, addressed the newcomer with a patronizing inflection, modulated in her best manner.

"Won't you come in, please?" she requested.

The shrinking girl shot another veiled look in the direction of the speaker.

"Are you Miss Turner?" she asked, in a voice broken by nervous dismay.

"Really, I am very sorry," Aggie replied, primly;

"but I am only her cousin, Miss Agnes Lynch. But Miss Turner is likely to be back any minute now."

"Can I wait?" came the timid question.

"Certainly," Aggie answered, hospitably. "Please sit down."

As the girl obediently sank down on the nearest chair, Garson addressed her sharply, so that the visitor started uneasily at the unexpected sound.

"You don't know Miss Turner?"

"No," came the faint reply.

"Then, what do you want to see her about?"

There was a brief pause before the girl could pluck up courage enough for an answer. Then, it was spoken confusedly, almost in a whisper.

"She once helped a girl friend of mine, and I thought—I thought——"

"You thought she might help you," Garson interrupted.

But Aggie, too, possessed some perceptive powers, despite the fact that she preferred to use them little in ordinary affairs.

"You have been in stir—prison, I mean." She hastily corrected the lapse into underworld slang.

Came a distressed muttering of assent from the girl.

"How sad!" Aggie remarked, in a voice of shocked pity for one so inconceivably unfortunate. "How very, very sad!"

This ingenuous method of diversion was put to an end by the entrance of Mary, who stopped short on seeing the limp figure huddled in the chair.

"A visitor, Agnes?" she inquired.

At the sound of her voice, and before Aggie could hit on a fittingly elegant form of reply, the girl looked up. And now, for the first time, she spoke with some degree of energy, albeit there was a sinister undertone in the husky voice.

"You're Miss Turner?" she questioned.

"Yes," Mary said, simply. Her words rang kindly; and she smiled encouragement.

A gasp burst from the white lips of the girl, and she cowered as one stricken physically.

"Mary Turner! Oh, my God! I——" She hid her face within her arms and sat bent until her head rested on her knees in an abasement of misery.

Vaguely startled by the hysterical outburst from the girl, Mary's immediate thought was that here was a pitiful instance of one suffering from starvation.

"Joe," she directed rapidly, "have Fannie bring a glass of milk with an egg and a little brandy in it, right away."

The girl in the chair was shaking soundlessly under the stress of her emotions. A few disjointed phrases fell from her quivering lips.

"I didn't know—oh, I couldn't!"

"Don't try to talk just now," Mary warned, reassuringly. "Wait until you've had something to eat."

Aggie, who had observed developments closely, now lifted her voice in tardy lamentations over her own stupidity. There was no affectation of the fine lady in her self-reproach.

"Why, the poor gawk's hungry!" she exclaimed. "And I never got the dope on her. Ain't I the simp!"

The girl regained a degree of self-control, and showed something of forlorn dignity.

"Yes," she said dully, "I'm starving."

Mary regarded the afflicted creature with that sympathy born only of experience.

"Yes," she said softly, "I understand." Then she spoke to Aggie. "Take her to my room, and let her rest there for a while. Have her drink the egg and milk slowly, and then lie down for a few minutes anyhow."

Aggie obeyed with an air of bustling activity.

"Sure, I will!" she declared. She went to the girl and helped her to stand up. "We'll fix you out all right," she said, comfortingly. "Come along with me. . . . Hungry! Gee, but that's tough!"

Half an hour afterward, while Mary was at her desk, giving part of her attention to Joe Garson, who sat near, and part to a rather formidable pile of neatly arranged papers, Aggie reported with her charge, who, though still shambling of gait, and stooping, showed by some faint color in her face and an increased steadiness of bearing that the food had already strengthened her much.

"She would come," Aggie explained. "I thought she ought to rest for a while longer anyhow." She half-shoved the girl into a chair opposite the desk, in an absurd travesty on the maternal manner.

"I'm all right, I tell you," came the querulous protest.

Whereupon, Aggie gave over the uncongenial task of mothering, and settled herself comfortably in a chair, with her legs merely crossed as a compromise between ease and propriety.

"Are you quite sure?" Mary said to the girl. And then, as the other nodded in assent, she spoke with a compelling kindliness. "Then you must tell us all about it—this trouble of yours, you know. What is your name?"

Once again the girl had recourse to the swift, searching, furtive glance, but her voice was colorless as she replied, listlessly:

"Helen Morris."

Mary regarded the girl with an expression that was inscrutable when she spoke again.

"I don't have to ask if you have been in prison," she said gravely. "Your face shows it."

"I—I came out—three months ago," was the halting admission.

Mary watched the shrinking figure reflectively for a long minute before she spoke again. Then there was a deeper resonance in her voice.

"And you'd made up your mind to go straight?"

"Yes." The word was a whisper.

"You were going to do what the chaplain had told you," Mary went on in a voice vibrant with varied emotions. "You were going to start all over again, weren't you? You were going to begin a new life, weren't you?" The bent head of the girl bent still lower in assent. There came a cynical note into Mary's utterance now.

"It doesn't work very well, does it?" she asked, bitterly.

The girl gave sullen agreement.

"No," she said dully; "I'm whipped."

Mary's manner changed on the instant. She spoke cheerfully for the first time.

"Well, then," she questioned, "how would you like to work with us?"

The girl looked up for a second with another of her fleeting, stealthy glances.

"You—you mean that——?"

Mary explained her intention in the matter very explicitly. Her voice grew boastful.

"Our kind of work pays well when you know how. Look at us."

Aggie welcomed the opportunity for speech, too long delayed.

"Hats from Joseph's, gowns from Lucile's, and cracked ice from Tiffany's. But it ain't ladylike to wear it," she concluded with a reproachful glance at her mentor.

Mary disregarded the frivolous interruption, and went on speaking to the girl, and now there was something pleasantly cajoling in her manner.

"Suppose I should stake you for the present, and put you in with a good crowd. All you would have to do would be to answer advertisements for servant girls. I will see that you have the best of references. Then, when you get in with the right people, you will open the front door some night and let in the gang. Of course,

you will make a get-away when they do, and get your bit as well."

There flashed still another of the swift, sly glances, and the lips of the girl parted as if she would speak. But she did not; only, her head sagged even lower on her breast, and the shrunken form grew yet more shrunken. Mary, watching closely, saw these signs, and in the same instant a change came over her. Where before there had been an underlying suggestion of hardness, there was now a womanly warmth of genuine sympathy.

"It doesn't suit you?" she said, very softly. "Good! I was in hopes it wouldn't. So, here's another plan." Her voice had become very winning. "Suppose you could go West—some place where you would have a fair chance, with money enough so you could live like a human being till you got a start?"

There came a tensing of the relaxed form, and the head lifted a little so that the girl could look at her questioner. And, this time, the glance, though of the briefest, was less furtive.

"I will give you that chance," Mary said simply, "if you really want it."

That speech was like a current of strength to the wretched girl. She sat suddenly erect, and her words came eagerly.

"Oh, I do!" And now her hungry gaze remained fast on the face of the woman who offered her salvation.

Mary sprang up and moved a step toward the girl

who continued to stare at her, fascinated. She was now all wholesome. The memory of her own wrongs surged in her during this moment only to make her more appreciative of the blessedness of seemly life. She was moved to a divine compassion over this waif for whom she might prove a beneficent providence. There was profound conviction in the emphasis with which she spoke her warning.

"Then I have just one thing to say to you first. If you are going to live straight, start straight, and then go through with it. Do you know what that means?"

"You mean, keep straight all the time?" The girl spoke with a force drawn from the other's strength.

"I mean more than that," Mary went on earnestly. "I mean, forget that you were ever in prison. I don't know what you have done—I don't think I care. But whatever it was, you have paid for it—a pretty big price, too." Into these last words there crept the pathos of one who knew. The sympathy of it stirred the listener to fearful memories.

"I have, I have!" The thin voice broke, wailing.

"Well, then," Mary went on, "just begin all over again, and be sure you stand up for your rights. Don't let them make you pay a second time. Go where no one knows you, and don't tell the first people who are kind to you that you have been crooked. If they think you are straight, why, be it. Then nobody will have any right to complain." Her tone grew suddenly pleading. "Will you promise me this?"

"Yes, I promise," came the answer, very gravely, quickened with hope.

"Good!" Mary exclaimed, with a smile of approval. "Wait a minute," she added, and left the room.

"Huh! Pretty soft for some people," Aggie remarked to Garson, with a sniff. She felt no alarm lest she wound the sensibilities of the girl. She herself had never let delicacy interfere between herself and money. It was really stranger that the forger, who possessed a more sympathetic nature, did not scruple to speak an assent openly. Somehow, he felt an inexplicable prejudice against this abject recipient of Mary's bounty, though not for the world would he have checked the generous impulse on the part of the woman he so revered. It was his instinct on her behalf that made him now vaguely uneasy, as if he sensed some malign influence against her there present with them.

Mary returned soon. In her hand she carried a roll of bills. She went to the girl and held out the money. Her voice was business-like now, but very kind.

"Take this. It will pay your fare West, and keep you quite a while if you are careful."

But, without warning, a revulsion seized on the girl. Of a sudden, she shrank again, and turned her head away, and her body trembled.

"I can't take it," she stammered. "I can't! I can't!"

Mary stood silent for a moment from sheer amazement over the change. When she spoke, her voice had hardened a little. It is not agreeable to have one's beneficence flouted.

"Didn't you come here for help?" she demanded.

"Yes," was the faltering reply, "but—but—I didn't know—it was you!" The words came with a rush of desperation.

"Then, you have met me before?" Mary said, quietly.

"No, no!" The girl's voice rose shrill.

Aggie spoke her mind with commendable frankness. "She's lying."

And, once again, Garson agreed. His yes was spoken in a tone of complete certainty. That Mary, too, was of their opinion was shown in her next words.

"So, you have met me before? Where?"

The girl unwittingly made confession in her halting words.

"I—I can't tell you." There was despair in her voice.

"You must." Mary spoke with severity. She felt that this mystery held in it something sinister to herself. "You must," she repeated imperiously.

The girl only crouched lower.

"I can't!" she cried again. She was panting as if in exhaustion.

"Why can't you?" Mary insisted. She had no sympathy now for the girl's distress, merely a great suspicious curiosity.

"Because—because——" The girl could not go on.

Mary's usual shrewdness came to her aid, and she put her next question in a different direction.

"What were you sent up for?" she asked briskly. "Tell me."

It was Garson who broke the silence that followed.

"Come on, now!" he ordered. There was a savage note in his voice under which the girl visibly winced. Mary made a gesture toward him that he should not interfere. Nevertheless, the man's command had in it a threat which the girl could not resist and she answered, though with a reluctance that made the words seem dragged from her by some outside force—as indeed they were.

"For stealing."

"Stealing what?" Mary said.

"Goods."

"Where from?"

A reply came in a breath so low that it was barely audible.

"The Emporium."

In a flash of intuition, the whole truth was revealed to the woman who stood looking down at the cowering creature before her.

"The Emporium!" she repeated. There was a tragedy in the single word. Her voice grew cold with hate, the hate born of innocence long tortured. "Then you are the one who——"

The accusation was cut short by the girl's shriek.

"I am not! I am not, I tell you."

For a moment, Mary lost her poise. Her voice rose in a flare of rage.

"You are! You are!"

The craven spirit of the girl could struggle no more. She could only sit in a huddled, shaking heap of dread. The woman before her had been disciplined by sorrow

to sternest self-control. Though racked by emotions most intolerable, Mary soon mastered their expression to such an extent that when she spoke again, as if in self-communion, her words came quietly, yet with overtones of a supreme wo.

"She did it!" Then, after a little, she addressed the girl with a certain wondering before this mystery of horror. "Why did you throw the blame on me?"

The girl made several efforts before her mumbling became intelligible, and then her speech was gasping, broken with fear.

"I found out they were watching me, and I was afraid they would catch me. So, I took them and ran into the cloak-room, and put them in a locker that wasn't close to mine, and some in the pocket of a coat that was hanging there. God knows I didn't know whose it was. I just put them there—I was frightened——"

"And you let me go to prison for three years!" There was a menace in Mary's voice under which the girl cringed again.

"I was scared," she whined. "I didn't dare to tell."

"But they caught you later," Mary went on inexorably. "Why didn't you tell then?"

"I was afraid," came the answer from the shuddering girl. "I told them it was the first time I had taken anything and they let me off with a year."

Once more, the wrath of the victim flamed high.

"You!" Mary cried. "You cried and lied, and they let you off with a year. I wouldn't cry. I told the truth —and——" Her voice broke in a tearless sob. The

"I'LL NEVER FORGIVE MYSELF, . . . NEVER", SHE MOANED. "OH, YES, YOU WILL", MARY SAID. "PEOPLE FORGIVE THEMSELVES PRETTY EASILY."

color had gone out of her face, and she stood rigid, looking down at the girl whose crime had ruined her life with an expression of infinite loathing in her eyes. Garson rose from his chair as if to go to her, and his face passed swiftly from compassion to ferocity as his gaze went from the woman he had saved from the river to the girl who had been the first cause of her seeking a grave in the waters. Yet, though he longed with every fiber of him to comfort the stricken woman, he did not dare intrude upon her in this time of her anguish, but quietly dropped back into his seat and sat watching with eyes now tender, now baleful, as they shifted their direction.

Aggie took advantage of the pause. Her voice was acid.

"Some people are sneaks—just sneaks!"

Somehow, the speech was welcome to the girl, gave her a touch of courage sufficient for cowardly protestations. It seemed to relieve the tension drawn by the other woman's torment. It was more like the abuse that was familiar to her. A gush of tears came.

"I'll never forgive myself, never!" she moaned.

Contempt mounted in Mary's breast.

"Oh, yes, you will," she said, malevolently. "People forgive themselves pretty easily." The contempt checked for a little the ravages of her grief. "Stop crying," she commanded harshly. "Nobody is going to hurt you." She thrust the money again toward the girl, and crowded it into the half-reluctant, half-greedy hand.

"Take it, and get out." The contempt in her voice rang still sharper, mordant.

Even the puling creature writhed under the lash of Mary's tones. She sprang up, slinking back a step.

"I can't take it!" she cried, whimpering. But she did not drop the money.

"Take the chance while you have it," Mary counseled, still with the contempt that pierced even the hardened girl's sense of selfishness. She pointed toward the door. "Go!—before I change my mind."

The girl needed, indeed, no second bidding. With the money still clutched in her hand, she went forth swiftly, stumbling a little in her haste, fearful lest, at the last moment, the woman she had so wronged should in fact change in mood, take back the money—ay, even give her over to that terrible man with the eyes of hate, to put her to death as she deserved.

Freed from the miasma of that presence, Mary remained motionless for a long minute, then sighed from her tortured heart. She turned and went slowly to her chair at the desk, and seated herself languidly, weakened by the ordeal through which she had passed.

"A girl I didn't know!" she said, bewilderedly; "perhaps had never spoken to—who smashed my life like that! Oh, if it wasn't so awful, it would be—funny! It would be funny!" A gust of hysterical laughter burst from her. "Why, it is funny!" she cried, wildly. "It is funny!"

"Mary!" Garson exclaimed sharply. He leaped

across the room to face her. "That's no good!" he said severely.

Aggie, too, rushed forward.

"No good at all!" she declared loudly.

The interference recalled the distressed woman to herself. She made a desperate effort for self-command. Little by little, the unmeaning look died down, and presently she sat silent and moveless, staring at the two with stormy eyes out of a wan face.

"You were right," she said at last, in a lifeless voice. "It's done, and can't be undone. I was a fool to let it affect me like that. I really thought I had lost all feeling about it, but the sight of that girl—the knowledge that she had done it—brought it all back to me. Well, you understand, don't you?"

"We understand," Garson said, grimly. But there was more than grimness, infinitely more, in the expression of his clear, glowing eyes.

Aggie thought that it was her turn to voice herself, which she did without undue restraint.

"Perhaps, we do, but I dunno! I'll tell you one thing, though. If any dame sent me up for three years and then wanted money from me, do you think she'd get it? Wake me up any time in the night and ask me. Not much—not a little bit much! I'd hang on to it like an old woman to her last tooth." And that was Aggie's final summing up of her impressions concerning the scene she had just witnessed.

CHAPTER XII.

A BRIDEGROOM SPURNED.

After Aggie's vigorous comment there followed a long silence. That volatile young person, little troubled as she was by sensitiveness, guessed the fact that just now further discussion of the event would be distasteful to Mary, and so she betook herself discreetly to a cigarette and the illustrations of a popular magazine devoted to the stage. As for the man, his reticence was really from a fear lest in speaking at all he might speak too freely, might betray the pervasive violence of his feeling. So, he sat motionless and wordless, his eyes carefully avoiding Mary in order that she might not be disturbed by the invisible vibrations thus sent from one to another. Mary herself was shaken to the depths. A great weariness, a weariness that cried the worthlessness of all things, had fallen upon her. It rested leaden on her soul. It weighed down her body as well, though that mattered little indeed. Yet, since she could minister to that readily, she rose and went to a settee on the opposite side of the room where she arranged herself among the cushions in a posture more luxurious than her rather precise early training usually permitted her to assume in the presence of others. There she rested, and soon felt the tides of energy again flowing in her

blood, and that same vitality, too, wrought healing even for her agonized soul, though more slowly. The perfect health of her gave her strength to recover speedily from the shock she had sustained. It was this health that made the glory of the flawless skin, white with a living white that revealed the coursing blood beneath, and the crimson lips that bent in smiles so tender, or so wistful, and the limpid eyes in which always lurked fires that sometimes burst into flame, the lustrous mass of undulating hair that sparkled in the sunlight like an aureole to her face or framed it in heavy splendors with its shadows, and the supple erectness of her graceful carriage, the lithe dignity of her every movement.

But, at last, she stirred uneasily and sat up. Garson accepted this as a sufficient warrant for speech.

"You know—Aggie told you—that Cassidy was up here from Headquarters. He didn't put a name to it, but I'm on." Mary regarded him inquiringly, and he continued, putting the fact with a certain brutal bluntness after the habit of his class. "I guess you'll have to quit seeing young Gilder. The bulls are wise. His father has made a holler.

"Don't let that worry you, Joe," she said tranquilly. She allowed a few seconds go by, then added as if quite indifferent: "I was married to Dick Gilder this morning." There came a squeal of amazement from Aggie, a start of incredulity from Garson.

"Yes," Mary repeated evenly, "I was married to him this morning. That was my important engagement," she added with a smile toward Aggie. For some intui-

tive reason, mysterious to herself, she did not care to meet the man's eyes at that moment.

Aggie sat erect, her baby face alive with worldly glee.

"My Gawd, what luck!" she exclaimed noisily. "Why, he's a king fish, he is. Gee! But I'm glad you landed him!"

"Thank you," Mary said with a smile that was the result of her sense of humor rather than from any tenderness.

It was then that Garson spoke. He was a delicate man in his sensibilities at times, in spite of the fact that he followed devious methods in his manner of gaining a livelihood. So, now, he put a question of vital significance.

"Do you love him?"

The question caught Mary all unprepared, but she retained her self-control sufficiently to make her answer in a voice that to the ordinary ear would have revealed no least tremor.

"No," she said. She offered no explanation, no excuse, merely stated the fact in all its finality.

Aggie was really shocked, though for a reason altogether sordid, not one whit romantic.

"Ain't he young?" she demanded aggressively. "Ain't he good-looking, and loose with his money something scandalous? If I met up with a fellow as liberal as him, if he was three times his age, I could simply adore him!"

It was Garson who pressed the topic with an inexor-

able curiosity born of his unselfish interest in the woman concerned.

"Then, why did you marry him?" he asked. The sincerity of him was excuse enough for the seeming indelicacy of the question. Besides, he felt himself somehow responsible. He had given back to her the gift of life, which she had rejected. Surely, he had the right to know the truth.

It seemed that Mary believed her confidence his due, for she told him the fact.

"I have been working and scheming for nearly a year to do it," she said, with a hardening of her face that spoke of indomitable resolve. "Now, it's done." A vindictive gleam shot from her violet eyes as she added: "It's only the beginning, too."

Garson, with the keen perspicacity that had made him a successful criminal without a single conviction to mar his record, had seized the implication in her statement, and now put it in words.

"Then, you won't leave us? We're going on as we were before?" The hint of dejection in his manner had vanished. "And you won't live with him?"

"Live with him?" Mary exclaimed emphatically. "Certainly not!"

Aggie's neatly rounded jaw dropped in a gape of surprise that was most unladylike.

"You are going to live on in this joint with us?" she questioned, aghast.

"Of course." The reply was given with the utmost of certainty.

Aggie presented the crux of the matter.

"Where will hubby live?"

There was no lessening of the bride's composure as she replied, with a little shrug.

"Anywhere but here."

Aggie suddenly giggled. To her sense of humor there was something vastly diverting in this new scheme of giving bliss to a fond husband.

"Anywhere but here," she repeated gaily. "Oh, won't that be nice—for him? Oh, yes! Oh, quite so! Oh, yes, indeed—quite so—so!"

Garson, however, was still patient in his determination to apprehend just what had come to pass.

"Does he understand the arrangement?" was his question.

"No, not yet," Mary admitted, without sign of embarrassment.

"Well," Aggie said, with another giggle, "when you do get around to tell him, break it to him gently."

Garson was intently considering another phase of the situation, one suggested perhaps out of his own deeper sentiments.

"He must think a lot of you!" he said, gravely. "Don't he?"

For the first time, Mary was moved to the display of a slight confusion. She hesitated a little before her answer, and when she spoke it was in a lower key, a little more slowly.

"I—I suppose so."

Aggie presented the truth more subtly than could have been expected from her.

"Think a lot of you? Of course he does! Thinks enough to marry you! And believe me, kid, when a man thinks enough of you to marry you, well, that's some thinking!"

Somehow, the crude expression of this professional adventuress penetrated to Mary's conscience, though it held in it the truth to which her conscience bore witness, to which she had tried to shut her ears. . . . And now from the man came something like a draught of elixir to her conscience—like the trump of doom to her scheme of vengeance.

Garson spoke very softly, but with an intensity that left no doubt as to the honesty of his purpose.

"I'd say, throw up the whole game and go to him, if you really care."

There fell a tense silence. It was broken by Mary herself. She spoke with a touch of haste, as if battling against some hindrance within.

"I married him to get even with his father," she said. "That's all there is to it. . . . By the way, I expect Dick will be here in a minute or two. When he comes, just remember not to—enlighten him."

Aggie sniffed indignantly.

"Don't worry about me, not a mite. Whenever it's really wanted, I'm always there with a full line of that lady stuff." Thereupon, she sprang up, and proceeded to give her conception of the proper welcoming of the happy bridegroom. The performance was amusing

enough in itself, but for some reason it moved neither of the two for whom it was rendered to more than perfunctory approval. The fact had no depressing effect on the performer, however, and it was only the coming of the maid that put her lively sallies to an end.

"Mr. Gilder," Fannie announced.

Mary put a question with so much of energy that Garson began finally to understand the depth of her vindictive feeling.

"Any one with him?"

"No, Miss Turner," the maid answered.

"Have him come in," Mary ordered.

Garson felt that he would be better away for the sake of the newly married pair at least, if not for his own. He made hasty excuses and went out on the heels of the maid. Aggie, however, consulting only her own wishes in the matter, had no thought of flight, and, if the truth be told, Mary was glad of the sustaining presence of another woman.

She got up slowly, and stood silent, while Aggie regarded her curiously. Even to the insensitive observer, there was something strange in the atmosphere. . . . A moment later the bridegroom entered.

He was still clean-cut and wholesome. Some sons of wealthy fathers are not, after four years experience of the white lights of town. And the lines of his face were firmer, better in every way. It seemed, indeed, that here was some one of a resolute character, not to be wasted on the trivial and gross things. In an instant, he had gone to her, had caught her in his arms with, "Hello,

dear!" smothered in the kiss he implanted on her lips.

Mary strove vainly to free herself.

"Don't, oh, don't!" she gasped.

Dick Gilder released his wife from his arms and smiled the beatific smile of the newly-wed.

"Why not?" he demanded, with a smile, a smile calm, triumphant, masterful.

"Agnes!" . . . It was the sole pretext to which Mary could turn for a momentary relief.

The bridegroom faced about, and perceived Agnes, who stood closely watching the meeting between husband and wife. He made an excellent formal bow of the sort that one learns only abroad, and spoke quietly.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Lynch, but"—a smile of perfect happiness shone on his face—"you could hardly expect me to see any one but Mary under the circumstances. Could you?"

Aggie strove to rise to this emergency, and again took on her best manner, speaking rather coldly.

"Under what circumstances?" she inquired.

The young man exclaimed joyously.

"Why, we were married this morning."

Aggie accepted the news with fitting excitement.

"Goodness gracious! How perfectly lovely!"

The bridegroom regarded her with a face that was luminous of delight.

"You bet, it's lovely!" he declared with entire conviction. He turned to Mary, his face glowing with satisfaction.

"Mary," he said, "I have the honeymoon trip all fixed. The Mauretania sails at five in the morning, so we will——"

A cold voice struck suddenly through this rhapsodizing. It was that of the bride.

"Where is your father?" she asked, without any trace of emotion.

The bridegroom stopped short, and a deep blush spread itself over his boyish face. His tone was filled full to overflowing with compunction as he answered.

"Oh, Lord! I had forgotten all about Dad." He beamed on Mary with a smile half-ashamed, half-happy. "I'm awfully sorry," he said earnestly. "I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll send Dad a wireless from the ship, then write him from Paris."

But the confident tone brought no response of agreement from Mary. On the contrary, her voice was, if anything, even colder as she replied to his suggestion. She spoke with an emphasis that brooked no evasion.

"What was your promise? I told you that I wouldn't go with you until you had brought your father to me, and he had wished us happiness." Dick placed his hands gently on his wife's shoulders and regarded her with a touch of indignation in his gaze.

"Mary," he said reproachfully, "you are not going to hold me to that promise?"

The answer was given with a decisiveness that admitted of no question, and there was a hardness in her face that emphasized the words.

"I am going to hold you to that promise, Dick."

For a few seconds, the young man stared at her with troubled eyes. Then he moved impatiently, and dropped his hands from her shoulders. But his usual cheery smile came again, and he shrugged resignedly.

"All right, Mrs. Gilder," he said, gaily. The sound of the name provoked him to new pleasure. "Sounds fine, doesn't it?" he demanded, with an uxorious air.

"Yes," Mary said, but there was no enthusiasm in her tone.

The husband went on speaking with no apparent heed of his wife's indifference.

"You pack up what things you need, girlie," he directed. "Just a few—because they sell clothes in Paris. And they are some class, believe me! And meantime, I'll run down to Dad's office, and have him back here in half an hour. You will be all ready, won't you?"

Mary answered quickly, with a little catching of her breath, but still coldly.

"Yes, yes, I'll be ready. Go and bring your father."

"You bet I will," Dick cried heartily. He would have taken her in his arms again, but she evaded the caress. "What's the matter?" he demanded, plainly at a loss to understand this repulse.

"Nothing!" was the ambiguous answer.

"Just one!" Dick pleaded.

"No," the bride replied, and there was determination in the monosyllable.

It was evident that Dick perceived the futility of argument.

"For a married woman you certainly are shy," he re-

plied, with a sly glance toward Aggie, who beamed back sympathy. "You'll excuse me, won't you, Miss Lynch? . . . Good-by, Mrs. Gilder." He made a formal bow to his wife. As he hurried to the door, he expressed again his admiration for the name. "Mrs. Gilder! Doesn't that sound immense?" And with that he was gone.

There was silence in the drawing-room until the two women heard the closing of the outer door of the apartment. Then, at last, Aggie relieved her pent-up emotions in a hugh sigh that was near a groan.

"Oh Gawd!" she gasped. "The poor simp!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ADVENT OF GRIGGS.

Later on, Garson, learning from the maid that Dick Gilder had left, returned, just as Mary was glancing over the release, with which General Hastings was to be compensated, along with the return of his letters, for his payment of ten thousand dollars to Miss Agnes Lynch.

"Hello, Joe," Mary said graciously as the forger entered. Then she spoke crisply to Agnes. "And now you must get ready. You are to be at Harris's office with this document at four o'clock, and remember that you are to let the lawyer manage everything."

Aggie twisted her doll-like face into a grimace.

"It gets my angora that I'll have to miss Pa Gilder's being led like a lamb to the slaughter-house." And that was the nearest the little adventuress ever came to making a Biblical quotation.

"Anyhow," she protested, "I don't see the use of all this monkey business here. All I want is the coin." But she hurried obediently, nevertheless, to get ready for the start.

Garson regarded Mary quizzically.

"It's lucky for her that she met you," he said. "She's got no more brains than a gnat."

"And brains are mighty useful things, even in our business," Mary replied seriously; "particularly in our business."

"I should say they were," Garson agreed. "You have proved that."

Aggie came back, putting on her gloves, and cocking her small head very primly under the enormous hat that was garnished with costliest plumes. It was thus that she consoled herself in a measure for the business of the occasion—in lieu of cracked ice from Tiffany's at one hundred and fifty a carat. Mary gave over the release, and Aggie, still grumbling, deposited it in her handbag.

"It seems to me we're going through a lot of red tape," she said spitefully.

Mary, from her chair at the desk, regarded the malcontent with a smile, but her tone was crisp as she answered.

"Listen, Agnes. The last time you tried to make a man give up part of his money it resulted in your going to prison for two years."

Aggie sniffed, as if such an outcome were the merest bagatelle.

"But that way was so exciting," she urged, not at all convinced.

"And this way is so safe," Mary rejoined, sharply. "Besides, my dear, you would not get the money. My way will. Your way was blackmail; mine is not. Understand?"

"Oh, sure," Aggie replied, grimly, on her way to the door. "It's clear as Pittsburgh." With that sarcasm

directed against legal subtleties, she tripped daintily out, an entirely ravishing vision, if somewhat garish as to raiment, and soon in the glances of admiration that every man cast on her guileless-seeming beauty, she forgot that she had ever been annoyed.

Garson's comment as she departed was uttered with his accustomed bluntness.

"Solid ivory!"

"She's a darling, anyway!" Mary declared, smiling. "You really don't half-appreciate her, Joe!"

"Anyhow, I appreciate that hat," was the reply, with a dry chuckle.

"Mr. Griggs," Fannie announced. There was a smile on the face of the maid, which was explained a minute later when, in accordance with her mistress's order, the visitor was shown into the drawing-room, for his presence was of an elegance so extraordinary as to attract attention anywhere—and mirth as well from ribald observers.

Meantime, Garson had explained to Mary.

"It's English Eddie—you met him once. I wonder what he wants? Probably got a trick for me. We often used to work together."

"Nothing without my consent," Mary warned.

"Oh, no, no, sure not!" Garson agreed.

Further discussion was cut short by the appearance of English Eddie himself, a tall, handsome man in the early thirties, who paused just within the doorway, and delivered to Mary a bow that was the perfection of elegance. Mary made no effort to restrain the smile caused

by the costume of Mr. Griggs. Yet, there was no violation of the canons of good taste, except in the aggregate. From spats to hat, from walking coat to gloves, everything was perfect of its kind. Only, there was an over-elaboration, so that the ensemble was flamboyant. And the man's manners precisely harmonized with his clothes, whereby the whole effect was emphasized and rendered bizarre. Garson took one amazed look, and then rocked with laughter.

Griggs regarded his former associate reproachfully for a moment, and then grinned in frank sympathy.

"Really, Mr. Griggs, you quite overcome me," Mary said, half-apologetically.

The visitor cast a self-satisfied glance over his garb.

"I think it's rather neat, myself." He had some reputation in the under-world for his manner of dressing, and he regarded this latest achievement as his masterpiece.

"Sure some duds!" Garson admitted, checking his merriment.

"From your costume," Mary suggested, "one might judge that this is purely a social call. Is it?"

"Well, not exactly," Griggs answered with a smile.

"So I fancied," his hostess replied. "So, sit down, please, and tell us all about it."

While she was speaking, Garson went to the various doors, and made sure that all were shut, then he took a seat in a chair near that which Griggs occupied by the desk, so that the three were close together, and could speak softly.

English Eddie wasted no time in getting to the point.

"Now, look here," he said, rapidly. "I've got the greatest game in the world. . . . Two years ago, a set of Gothic tapestries, worth three hundred thousand dollars and a set of *Fragonard* panels, worth nearly as much more, were plucked from a château in France and smuggled into this country."

"I have never heard of that," Mary said, with some interest.

"No," Griggs replied. "You naturally wouldn't, for the simple reason that it's been kept on the dead quiet."

"Are them things really worth that much?" Garson exclaimed.

"Sometimes more," Mary answered. "Morgan has a set of Gothic tapestries worth half a million dollars."

Garson uttered an ejaculation of disgust.

"He pays half a million dollars for a set of rugs!" There was a note of fiercest bitterness come into his voice as he sarcastically concluded: "And they wonder at crime!"

Griggs went on with his account.

"About a month ago, the things I was telling you of were hung in the library of a millionaire in this city." He hitched his chair a little closer to the desk, and leaned forward, lowering his voice almost to a whisper as he stated his plan.

"Let's go after them. They were smuggled, mind you, and no matter what happens, he can't squeal. What do you say?"

Garson shot a piercing glance at Mary.

"It's up to her," he said. Griggs regarded Mary eagerly, as she sat with eyes downcast. Then, after a little interval had elapsed in silence, he spoke interrogatively:

"Well?"

Mary shook her head decisively. "It's out of our line," she declared.

Griggs would have argued the matter. "I don't see any easier way to get half a million," he said aggressively.

Mary, however, was unimpressed.

"If it were fifty millions, it would make no difference. It's against the law."

"Oh, I know all that, of course," Griggs returned impatiently. "But if you can——"

Mary interrupted him in a tone of finality.

"My friends and I never do anything that's illegal! Thank you for coming to us, Mr. Griggs, but we can't go in, and there's an end of the matter."

"But wait a minute," English Eddie expostulated, "you see this chap, Gilder, is——"

Mary's manner changed from indifference to sudden keen interest.

"Gilder?" she exclaimed, questioningly.

"Yes. You know who he is," Griggs answered; "the drygoods man."

Garson in his turn showed a new excitement as he bent toward Mary.

"Why, it's old Gilder, the man you——"

Mary, however, had regained her self-control, for a

moment rudely shaken, and now her voice was tranquil again as she replied:

"I know. But, just the same, it's illegal, and I won't touch it. That's all there is to it."

Griggs was dismayed.

"But half a million!" he exclaimed, disconsolately. "There's a stake worth playing for. Think of it!" He turned pleadingly to Garson. "Half a million, Joe!"

The forger repeated the words with an inflection that was gloating.

"Half a million!"

"And it's the softest thing you ever saw."

The telephone at the desk rang, and Mary spoke into it for a moment, then rose and excused herself to resume the conversation over the wire more privately in the booth. The instant she was out of the room, Griggs turned to Garson anxiously.

"It's a cinch, Joe," he pleaded. "I've got a plan of the house." He drew a paper from his breast-pocket, and handed it to the forger, who seized it avidly and studied it with intent, avaricious eyes.

"It looks easy," Garson agreed, as he gave back the paper.

"It is easy," Griggs reiterated. "What do you say?"

Garson shook his head in refusal, but there was no conviction in the act.

"I promised Mary never to——"

Griggs broke in on him.

"But a chance like this! Anyhow, come around to

the back room at Blinkey's to-night, and we'll have a talk. Will you?"

"What time?" Garson asked hesitatingly, tempted.

"Make it early, say nine," was the answer. "Will you?"

"I'll come," Garson replied, half-guiltily. And in the same moment Mary reëntered.

Griggs rose and spoke with an air of regret.

"It's 'follow the leader,'" he said, "and since you are against it, that settles it."

"Yes, I'm against it," Mary said, firmly.

"I'm sorry," English Eddie rejoined. "But we must all play the game as we see it. . . . Well, that was the business I was after, and, as it's finished, why, good-afternoon, Miss Turner." He nodded toward Joe, and took his departure.

Something of what was in his mind was revealed in Garson's first speech after Griggs's going.

"That's a mighty big stake he's playing for."

"And a big chance he's taking!" Mary retorted. "No, Joe, we don't want any of that. We'll play a game that's safe and sure."

The words recalled to the forger weird forebodings that had been troubling him throughout the day.

"It's sure enough," he stated, "but is it safe?"

Mary looked up quickly.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

Garson walked to and fro nervously as he answered.

"S'pose the bulls get tired of you putting it over on 'em and try some rough work?"

Mary smiled carelessly.

"Don't worry, Joe," she advised. "I know a way to stop it."

"Well, so far as that goes, so do I," the forger said, with significant emphasis.

"Just what do you mean by that?" Mary demanded, suspiciously.

"For rough work," he said, "I have this." He took a magazine pistol from his pocket. It was of an odd shape, with a barrel longer than is usual and a bell-shaped contrivance attached to the muzzle.

"No, no, Joe," Mary cried, greatly discomposed. "None of that—ever!"

The forger smiled, and there was malignant triumph in his expression.

"Pooh!" he exclaimed. "Even if I used it, they would never get on to me. See this?" He pointed at the strange contrivance on the muzzle.

Mary's curiosity made her forget for a moment her distaste.

"What is it?" she asked, interestedly. "I have never seen anything like that before."

"Of course you haven't," Garson answered with much pride. "I'm the first man in the business to get one, and I'll bet on it. I keep up with the times." For once, he was revealing that fundamental egotism which is the characteristic of all his kind. "That's one of the new Maxim silencers," he continued. "With smokeless powder in the cartridges, and the silencer on, I can make a shot from my coat-pocket, and you wouldn't even

know it had been done. . . . And I'm some shot, believe me."

"Impossible!" Mary ejaculated.

"No, it ain't," the man asserted. "Here, wait, I'll show you."

"Good gracious, not here!" Mary exclaimed in alarm. "We would have the whole place down on us."

Garson chuckled.

"You just watch that dinky little vase on the table across the room there. 'Tain't very valuable, is it?"

"No," Mary answered.

In the same instant, while still her eyes were on the vase, it fell in a cascade of shivered glass to the table and floor. She had heard no sound, she saw no smoke. Perhaps, there had been a faintest clicking noise. She was not sure. She stared dumfounded for a few seconds, then turned her bewildered face toward Garson, who was grinning in high enjoyment.

"I would'nt have believed it possible," she declared, vastly impressed.

"Neat little thing, ain't it?" the man asked, exultantly.

"Where did you get it?" Mary asked.

"In Boston, last week. And between you and me, Mary, it's the only model, and it sure is a corker for crime."

The sinister association of ideas made Mary shudder, but she said no more. She would have shuddered again, if she could have guessed the vital part that pistol was destined to play. But she had no thought of any actual

peril to come from it. She might have thought otherwise, could she have known of the meeting that night in the back room of Blinkey's, where English Eddie and Garson sat with their heads close together over a table.

"A chance like this," Griggs was saying, "a chance that will make a fortune for all of us."

"It sounds good," Garson admitted, wistfully.

"It is good," the other declared with an oath. "Why, if this goes through, we're set up for life. We can quit, all of us."

"Yes," Garson agreed, "we can quit, all of us." There was avarice in his voice.

The tempter was sure that the battle was won, and smiled contentedly.

"Well," he urged, "what do you say?"

"How would we split it?" It was plain that Garson had given over the struggle against greed. After all, Mary was only a woman, despite her cleverness, and with all a woman's timidity. Here was sport for men.

"Three ways would be right," Griggs answered. "One to me, one to you and one to be divided up among the others."

Garson brought his fist down on the table with a force that made the glasses jingle.

"You're on," he said, strongly.

"Fine!" Griggs declared, and the two men shook hands. "Now, I'll get——"

"Get nothing!" Garson interrupted. "I'll get my own men. Chicago Red is in town. So is Dacey, with perhaps a couple of others of the right sort. I'll get them

to meet you at Blinkey's at two to-morrow afternoon, and, if it looks right, we'll turn the trick to-morrow night."

"That's the stuff," Griggs agreed, greatly pleased.

But a sudden shadow fell on the face of Garson. He bent closer to his companion, and spoke with a fierce intensity that brooked no denial.

"She must never know."

Griggs nodded understandingly.

"Of course," he answered. "I give you my word that I'll never tell her. And you know you can trust me, Joe."

"Yes," the forger replied somberly, "I know I can trust you." But the shadow did not lift from his face.

CHAPTER XIV.

A WEDDING ANNOUNCEMENT.

Mary dismissed Garson presently, and betook herself to her bedroom for a nap. The day had been a trying one, and, though her superb health could endure much, she felt that both prudence and comfort required that she should recruit her energies while there was opportunity. She was not in the least surprised that Dick had not yet returned, though he had mentioned half an hour. At the best, there were many things that might detain him, his father's absence from the office, difficulties in making arrangements for his projected honeymoon trip abroad—which would never occur—or the like. At the worst, there was a chance of finding his father promptly, and of that father as promptly taking steps to prevent the son from ever again seeing the woman who had so indiscreetly married him. Yet, somehow, Mary could not believe that her husband would yield to such paternal coercion. Rather, she was sure that he would prove loyal to her whom he loved, through every trouble. At the thought a certain wistfulness pervaded her, and a poignant regret that this particular man should have been the one chosen of fate to be entangled within her mesh of revenge. There throbbed in her a heart-tormenting realization that

there were in life possibilities infinitely more splendid than the joy of vengeance. She would not confess the truth even to her inmost soul, but the truth was there, and set her a-tremble with vague fears. Nevertheless, because she was in perfect health, and was much fatigued, her introspection did not avail to keep her awake, and within three minutes from the time she lay down she was blissfully unconscious of all things, both the evil and the good, revenge and love.

She had slept, perhaps, a half-hour, when Fannie awakened her.

"It's a man named Burke," she explained, as her mistress lay blinking. "And there's another man with him. They said they must see you."

By this time, Mary was wide-awake, for the name of Burke, the Police Inspector, was enough to startle her out of drowsiness.

"Bring them in, in five minutes," she directed.

She got up, slipped into a tea-gown, bathed her eyes in cologne, dressed her hair a little, and went into the drawing-room, where the two men had been waiting for something more than a quarter of an hour—to the violent indignation of both.

"Oh, here you are, at last!" the big, burly man cried as she entered. The whole air of him, though he was in civilian's clothes, proclaimed the policeman.

"Yes, Inspector," Mary replied pleasantly, as she advanced into the room. She gave a glance toward the other visitor, who was of a slenderer form, with a thin, keen face, and recognized him instantly as Demarest,

who had taken part against her as the lawyer for the store at the time of her trial, and who was now holding the office of District Attorney. She went to the chair at the desk, and seated herself in a leisurely fashion that increased the indignation of the fuming Inspector. She did not trouble to ask her self-invited guests to sit.

"To whom do I owe the pleasure of this visit, Inspector?" she remarked coolly. It was noticeable that she said whom and not what, as if she understood perfectly that the influence of some person brought him on this errand.

"I have come to have a few quiet words with you," the Inspector declared, in a mighty voice that set the globes of the chandeliers a-quiver. Mary disregarded him, and turned to the other man.

"How do you do, Mr. Demarest?" she said, evenly. "It's four years since we met, and they've made you District Attorney since then. Allow me to congratulate you."

Demarest's keen face took on an expression of perplexity.

"I'm puzzled," he confessed. "There is something familiar, somehow, about you, and yet——" He scrutinized appreciatively the loveliness of the girl with her classically beautiful face, that was still individual in its charm, the slim graces of the tall, lissome form. "I should have remembered you. I don't understand it."

"Can't you guess?" Mary questioned, somberly. "Search your memory, Mr. Demarest."

Of a sudden, the face of the District Attorney lightened.

"Why," he exclaimed, "you are—it can't be—yes—you are the girl, you're the Mary Turner whom I—oh, I know you now."

There was an enigmatic smile bending the scarlet lips as she answered.

"I'm the girl you mean, Mr. Demarest, but, for the rest, you don't know me—not at all!"

The burly figure of the Inspector of Police, which had loomed motionless during this colloquy, now advanced a step, and the big voice boomed threatening. It was very rough and weighted with authority.

"Young woman," Burke said, peremptorily, "the Twentieth Century Limited leaves Grand Central Station at four o'clock. It arrives in Chicago at eight-fifty-five to-morrow morning." He pulled a massive gold watch from his waistcoat pocket, glanced at it, thrust it back, and concluded ponderously: "You will just about have time to catch that train."

Mary regarded the stockily built officer with a half-amused contempt, which she was at no pains to conceal.

"Working for the New York Central now?" she asked blandly.

The gibe made the Inspector furious.

"I'm working for the good of New York City," he answered venomously.

Mary let a ripple of cadenced laughter escape her.

"Since when?" she questioned.

A little smile twisted the lips of the District Attorney, but he caught himself quickly, and spoke with stern gravity.

"Miss Turner, I think you will find that a different tone will serve you better."

"Oh, let her talk," Burke interjected angrily. "She's only got a few minutes anyway."

Mary remained unperturbed.

"Very well, then," she said genially, "let us be comfortable during that little period." She made a gesture of invitation toward chairs, which Burke disdained to accept; but Demarest seated himself.

"You'd better be packing your trunk," the Inspector rumbled.

"But why?" Mary inquired, with a tantalizing assumption of innocence. "I'm not going away."

"On the Twentieth Century Limited, this afternoon," the Inspector declared, in a voice of growing wrath.

"Oh, dear, no!" Mary's assertion was made very quietly, but with an underlying firmness that irritated the official beyond endurance.

"I say yes!" The answer was a bellow.

Mary appeared distressed, not frightened. Her words were an ironic protest against the man's obstreperous noisiness, no more.

"I thought you wanted quiet words with me."

Burke went toward her, in a rage.

"Now, look here, Mollie——" he began harshly.

On the instant, Mary was on her feet, facing him, and

there was a gleam in her eyes as they met his that bade him pause.

"Miss Turner, if you don't mind." She laughed slightly. "For the present, anyway." She reseated herself tranquilly.

Burke was checked, but he retained his severity of bearing.

"I'm giving you your orders. You will either go to Chicago, or you'll go up the river."

Mary answered in a voice charged with cynicism.

"If you can convict me. Pray, notice that little word 'if'."

The District Attorney interposed very suavely.

"I did once, remember."

"But you can't do it again," Mary declared, with an assurance that excited the astonishedment of the police official.

"How do you know he can't?" he blustered.

Mary laughed in a cadence of genial merriment.

"Because," she replied gaily, "if he could, he would have had me in prison some time ago."

Burke winced, but he made shift to conceal his realization of the truth she had stated to him.

"Huh!" he exclaimed gruffly. "I've seen them go up pretty easy."

Mary met the assertion with a serenity that was baffling.

"The poor ones," she vouchsafed; "not those that have money. I have money, plenty of money—now."

"Money you stole!" the Inspector returned, brutally.

"Oh, dear, no!" Mary cried, with a fine show of virtuous indignation.

"What about the thirty thousand dollars you got on that partnership swindle?" Burke asked, sneering. "I s'pose you didn't steal that!"

"Certainly not," was the ready reply. "The man advertised for a partner in a business sure to bring big and safe returns. I answered. The business proposed was to buy a tract of land, and subdivide it. The deeds to the land were all forged, and the supposed seller was his confederate, with whom he was to divide the money. We formed a partnership, with a capital of sixty thousand dollars. We paid the money into the bank, and then at once I drew it out. You see, he wanted to get my money illegally, but instead I managed to get his legally. For it was legal for me to draw that money—wasn't it, Mr. Demarest?"

The District Attorney by an effort retained his severe expression of righteous disapprobation, but he admitted the truth of her contention.

"Unfortunately, yes," he said gravely. "A partner has the right to draw out any, or all, of the partnership funds."

"And I was a partner," Mary said contentedly. "You see, Inspector, you wrong me—you do, really! I'm not a swindler; I'm a financier."

Burke sneered scornfully.

"Well," he roared, "you'll never pull another one on me. You can gamble on that!"

Mary permitted herself to laugh mockingly in the face of the badgered official.

"Thank you for telling me," she said, graciously. "And let me say, incidentally, that Miss Lynch at the present moment is painlessly extracting ten thousand dollars from General Hastings in a perfectly legal manner, Inspector Burke."

"Well, anyhow," Burke shouted, "you may stay inside the law, but you've got to get outside the city." He tried to employ an elephantine bantering tone. "On the level, now, do you think you could get away with that young Gilder scheme you've been planning?"

Mary appeared puzzled.

"What young Gilder scheme?" she asked, her brows drawn in bewilderment.

"Oh, I'm wise—I'm wise!" the Inspector cried roughly. "The answer is, once for all, leave town this afternoon, or you'll be in the Tombs in the morning."

Abruptly, a change came over the woman. Hitherto, she had been cynical, sarcastic, laughing, careless, impudent. Now, of a sudden, she was all seriousness, and she spoke with a gravity that, despite their volition, impressed both the men before her.

"It can't be done, Inspector," she said, sedately.

The declaration, simple as it was, aroused the official to new indignation.

"Who says it can't?" he vociferated, overflowing with anger at this flouting of the authority he represented.

Mary opened a drawer of the desk, and took out the

document obtained that morning from Harris, and held it forth.

"This," she replied, succinctly.

"What's this?" Burke stormed. But he took the paper.

Demarest looked over the Inspector's shoulder, and his eyes grew larger as he read. When he was at an end of the reading, he regarded the passive woman at the desk with a new respect.

"What's this?" Burke repeated helplessly. It was not easy for him to interpret the legal phraseology. Mary was kind enough to make the document clear to him.

"It's a temporary restraining order from the Supreme Court, instructing you to let me alone until you have legal proof that I have broken the law. . . . Do you get that, Mr. Inspector Burke?"

The plethoric official stared hard at the injunction.

"Another new one," he stuttered finally. Then his anger sought vent in violent assertion. "But it can't be done!" he shouted.

"You might ask Mr. Demarest," Mary suggested, pleasantly, "as to whether or not it can be done. The gambling houses can do it, and so keep on breaking the law. The race track men can do it, and laugh at the law. The railroad can do it, to restrain its employees from striking. So, why shouldn't I get one, too? You see, I have money. I can buy all the law I want. And there's nothing you can't do with the law, if you have money enough. . . . Ask Mr. Demarest. He knows."

Burke was fairly gasping over this outrage against his authority.

"Can you beat that!" he rumbled with a raucously sonorous vehemence. He regarded Mary with a stare of almost reverential wonder. "A crook appealing to the law!"

There came a new note into the woman's voice as she answered the gibe.

"No, simply getting justice," she said simply. "That's the remarkable part of it." She threw off her serious air. "Well, gentlemen," she concluded, "what are you going to do about it?"

Burke explained.

"This is what I'm going to do about it. One way or another, I'm going to get you."

The District Attorney, however, judged it advisable to use more persuasive methods.

"Miss Turner," he said, with an appearance of sincerity, "I'm going to appeal to your sense of fair play."

Mary's shining eyes met his for a long moment, and before the challenge in hers, his fell. He remembered then those doubts that had assailed him when this girl had been sentenced to prison, remembered the half-hearted plea he had made in her behalf to Richard Gilder.

"That was killed," Mary said, "killed four years ago."

But Demarest persisted. Influence had been brought to bear on him. It was for her own sake now that he urged her.

"Let young Gilder alone."

Mary laughed again. But there was no hint of joyousness in the musical tones. Her answer was frank—brutally frank. She had nothing to conceal.

"His father sent me away for three years—three years for something I didn't do. Well, he's got to pay for it."

By this time, Burke, a man of superior intelligence, as one must be to reach such a position of authority, had come to realize that here was a case not to be carried through by blustering, by intimidation, by the rough ruses familiar to the force. Here was a woman of extraordinary intelligence, as well as of peculiar personal charm, who merely made sport of his fulminations, and showed herself essentially armed against anything he might do, by a court injunction, a thing unheard of until this moment in the case of a common crook. It dawned upon him that this was, indeed, not a common crook. Moreover, there had grown in him a certain admiration for the ingenuity and resource of this woman, though he retained all his rancor against one who dared thus to resist the duly constituted authority. So, in the end, he spoke to her frankly, without a trace of his former virulence, with a very real, if rugged, sincerity.

"Don't fool yourself, my girl," he said in his huge voice, which was now modulated to a degree that made it almost unfamiliar to himself. "You can't go through with this. There's always a weak link in the chain somewhere. It's up to me to find it, and I will."

His candor moved her to a like honesty.

"Now," she said, and there was respect in the glance she gave the stalwart man, "now you really sound dangerous."

There came an interruption, alike unexpected by all. Fannie appeared at the door.

"Mr. Edward Gilder wishes to see you, Miss Turner," she said, with no appreciation of anything dynamic in the announcement. "Shall I show him in?"

"Oh, certainly," Mary answered, with an admirable pretense of indifference, while Burke glared at Demarest, and the District Attorney appeared ill at ease.

"He shouldn't have come," Demarest muttered, getting to his feet, in reply to the puzzled glance of the Inspector.

Then, while Mary sat quietly in her chair at the desk, and the two men stood watching doubtfully the door, the maid appeared, stood aside, and said simply, "Mr. Gilder."

There entered the erect, heavy figure of the man whom Mary had hated through the years. He stopped abruptly just within the room, gave a glance at the two men, then his eyes went to Mary, sitting at her desk, with her face lifted inquiringly. He did not pause to take in the beauty of that face, only its strength. He stared at her silently for a moment. Then he spoke in his oritund voice, a little tremulous from anxiety.

"Are you the woman?" he said. There was something simple and primitive, something of dignity beyond the usual conventions, in his direct address.

And there was the same primitive simplicity in the answer. Between the two strong natures there was no subterfuge, no suggestion of polite evasions, of tergiversation, only the plea of truth to truth. Mary's acknowledgment was as plain as his own question.

"I am the woman. What do you want?" Thus two honest folk had met face to face.

"My son." The man's answer was complete.

But Mary touched a tragic note in her question. It was asked in no frivolous spirit, but, of a sudden, she guessed that his coming was altogether of his own volition, and not the result of his son's information, as at first she had supposed.

"Have you seen him recently?" she asked.

"No," Gilder answered.

"Then, why did you come?"

Thereat, the man was seized with a fatherly fury. His heavy face was congested, and his sonorous voice was harsh with virtuous rebuke.

"Because I intend to save my boy from a great folly. I am informed that he is infatuated with you, and Inspector Burke tells me—why—he tells me—why—he tells me——" He paused, unable for a moment to continue from an excess of emotion. But his gray eyes burned fiercely in accusation against her.

Inspector Burke himself filled the void in the halting sentence.

"I told you she had been an ex-convict."

"Yes," Gilder said, after he had regained his self-con-

trol. He stared at her pleadingly. "Tell me," he said with a certain dignity, "is this true?"

Here, then, was the moment for which she had longed through weary days, through weary years. Here was the man whom she hated, suppliant before her to know the truth. Her heart quickened. Truly, vengeance is sweet to one who has suffered unjustly.

"Is this true?" the man repeated, with something of horror in his voice.

"It is," Mary said quietly.

For a little, there was silence in the room. Once, Inspector Burke started to speak, but the magnate made an imperative gesture, and the officer held his peace. Always, Mary rested motionless. Within her, a fierce joy surged. Here was the time of her victory. Opposite her was the man who had caused her anguish, the man whose unjust action had ruined her life. Now, he was her humble petitioner, but this servility could be of no avail to save him from shame. He must drink of the dregs of humiliation—and then again. No price were too great to pay for a wrong such as that which he had put upon her.

At last, Gilder was restored in a measure to his self-possession. He spoke with the sureness of a man of wealth, confident that money will salve any wound.

"How much?" he asked, baldly.

Mary smiled an inscrutable smile.

"Oh, I don't need money," she said, carelessly. "Inspector Burke will tell you how easy it is for me to get it."

Gilder looked at her with a newly dawning respect; then his shrewdness suggested a retort.

"Do you want my son to learn what you are?" he said.

Mary laughed. There was something dreadful in that burst of spurious amusement.

"Why not?" she answered. "I'm ready to tell him myself."

Then Gilder showed the true heart of him, in which love for his boy was before all else. He found himself wholly at a loss before the woman's unexpected reply.

"But I don't want him to know," he stammered. "Why, I've spared the boy all his life. If he really loves you—it will——"

At that moment, the son himself entered hurriedly from the hallway. In his eagerness, he saw no one save the woman whom he loved. At his entrance, Mary rose and moved backward a step involuntarily, in sheer surprise over his coming, even though she had known he must come—perhaps from some other emotion, deeper, hidden as yet even from herself.

The young man, with his wholesome face alight with tenderness, went swiftly to her, while the other three men stood silent, motionless, abashed by the event. And Dick took Mary's hand in a warm clasp, pressed it tenderly.

"I didn't see father," he said happily, "but I left him a note on his desk at the office."

Then, somehow, the surcharged atmosphere penetrated his consciousness, and he looked around, to see

his father standing grimly opposite him. But there was no change in his expression beyond a more radiant smile.

"Hello, Dad!" he cried, joyously. "Then you got my note?"

The voice of the older man came with a sinister force and saturnine.

"No, Dick, I haven't had any note."

"Then, why——?" The young man broke off suddenly. He was become aware that here was something malignant, with a meaning beyond his present understanding, for he saw the Inspector and Demarest, and he knew the two of them for what they were officially.

"What are they doing here?" he demanded suspiciously, staring at the two.

"Oh, never mind them," Mary said. There was a malevolent gleam in her violet eyes. This was the recompense of which she had dreamed through soul-tearing ages. "Just tell your father your news, Dick."

The young man had no comprehension of the fact that he was only a pawn in the game. He spoke with simple pride.

"Dad, we're married. Mary and I were married this morning."

Always, Mary stared with her eyes steadfast on the father. There was triumph in her gaze. This was the vengeance for which she had longed, for which she had plotted, the vengeance she had at at last achieved. Here was her fruition, the period of her supremacy.

Gilder himself seemed dazed by the brief sentence.

"Say that again," he commanded.

Mary rejoiced to make the knowledge sure.

"I married your son this morning," she said in a matter-of-fact tone. "I married him. Do you quite understand, Mr. Gilder? I married him." In that insistence lay her ultimate compensation for untold misery. The father stood there wordless, unable to find speech against this calamity that had befallen him.

It was Burke who offered a diverison, a crude interruption after his own fashion.

"It's a frame-up," he roared. He glared at the young man. "Tell your father it ain't true. Why, do you know what she is? She's done time." He paused for an instant, then spoke in a voice that was brutally menacing. "And, by God, she'll do it again!"

The young man turned toward his bride. There was disbelief, hope, despair, in his face, which had grown older by years with the passing of the seconds.

"It's a lie, Mary," he said. "Say it's a lie!" He seized her hand passionately.

There was no quiver in her voice as she answered. She drew her hand from his clasp, and spoke evenly.

"It's the truth."

"It's the truth!" the young man repeated, incredulously.

"It is the truth," Mary said, firmly. "I have served three years in prison."

There was a silence of a minute that was like years. It was the father who broke it, and now his voice was become tremulous.

"I wanted to save you, Dick. That's why I came."

The son interrupted him violently.

"There's a mistake—there must be."

It was Demarest who gave an official touch to the tragedy of the moment.

"There's no mistake," he said. There was authority in his statement.

"There is, I tell you!" Dick cried, horrified by this conspiracy of defamation. He turned his tortured face to his bride of a day.

"Mary," he said huskily, "there is a mistake."

Something in her face appalled him. He was voiceless for a few terrible instants. Then he spoke again, more beseechingly.

"Say there's a mistake."

Mary preserved her poise. Yes—she must not forget! This was the hour of her triumph. What mattered it that the honey of it was as ashes in her mouth? She spoke with a simplicity that admitted no denial.

"It's all quite true."

The man who had so loved her, so trusted her, was overwhelmed by the revelation. He stood trembling for a moment, tottered, almost it seemed would have fallen, but presently steadied himself and sank supinely into a chair, where he sat in impotent suffering.

The father looked at Mary with a reproach that was pathetic.

"See," he said, and his heavy voice was for once thin with passion," see what you've done to my boy!"

Mary had held her eyes on Dick. There had been in her gaze a conflict of emotions, strong and baffling.

Now, however, when the father spoke, her face grew more composed, and her eyes met his coldly. Her voice was level and vaguely dangerous as she answered his accusation.

"What is that compared to what you have done to me?"

Gilder stared at her in honest amazement. He had no suspicion as to the tragedy that lay between him and her.

"What have I done to you?" he questioned, uncomprehending.

Mary moved forward, passing beyond the desk, and continued her advance toward him until the two stood close together, face to face. She spoke softly, but with an intensity of supreme feeling in her voice.

"Do you remember what I said to you the day you had me sent away?"

The merchant regarded her with stark lack of understanding.

"I don't remember you at all," he said.

The woman looked at him intently for a moment, then spoke in a colorless voice.

"Perhaps you remember Mary Turner, who was arrested four years ago for robbing your store. And perhaps you remember that she asked to speak to you before they took her to prison."

The heavy-jowled man gave a start.

"Oh, you begin to remember. Yes! There was a girl who swore she was innocent—yes, she swore that

she was innocent. And she would have got off—only, you asked the judge to make an example of her."

The man to whom she spoke had gone gray a little. He began to understand, for he was not lacking in intelligence. Somehow, it was borne in on him that this woman had a grievance beyond the usual run of injuries.

"You are that girl?" he said. It was not a question, rather an affirmation.

Mary spoke with the dignity of long suffering—more than that, with the confident dignity of a vengeance long delayed, now at last achieved. Her words were simple enough, but they touched to the heart of the man accused by them.

"I am that girl."

There was a little interval of silence. Then, Mary spoke again, remorselessly.

"You took away my good name. You smashed my life. You put me behind the bars. You owe for all that. . . . . Well, I've begun to collect."

The man opposite her, the man of vigorous form, of strong face and keen eyes, stood gazing intently for long moments. In that time, he was learning many things. Finally, he spoke.

"And that is why you married my boy."

"It is." Mary gave the answer coldly, convincingly. Convincingly, save to one—her husband. Dick suddenly aroused, and spoke with the violence of one sure.

"It is not!"

Burke shouted a warning. Demarest, more diplo-

matic, made a restraining gesture toward the police official, then started to address the young man soothingly.

But Dick would have none of their interference.

"This is my affair," he said, and the others fell silent. He stood up and went to Mary, and took her two hands in his, very gently, yet very firmly.

"Mary," he said softly, yet with a strength of conviction, "you married me because you love me."

The wife shuddered, but she strove to deny.

"No," she said gravely, "no, I did not!"

"And you love me now!" he went on insistingly.

"No, no!" Mary's denial came like a cry for escape.

"You love me now!" There was a masterful quality in his declaration, which seemed to ignore her negation.

"I don't," she repeated bitterly.

But he was inexorable.

"Look me in the face, and say that."

He took her face in his hands, lifted it, and his eyes met hers searchingly.

"Look me in the face, and say that," he repeated.

There was a silence that seemed long, though it was measured in the passing of seconds. The three watchers dared not interrupt this drama of emotions, but, at last, Mary, who had planned so long for this hour, gathered her forces and spoke valiantly. Her voice was low, but without any weakness of doubt.

"I do not love you."

In the instant of reply, Dick Gilder, by some inspiration of love, changed his attitude.

"Just the same," he said cheerfully, "you are my wife, and I'm going to keep you and make you love me."

Mary felt a thrill of fear through her very soul.

"You can't!" she cried harshly. "You are his son!"

"She's a crook!" Burke said.

"I don't care a damn what you've been!" Dick exclaimed. "From now on you'll go straight. You'll walk the straightest line a woman ever walked. You'll put all thoughts of vengeance out of your heart, because I'll fill it with something bigger—I'm going to make you love me."

Burke, with his rousing voice, spoke again:

"I tell you, she's a crook!"

Mary moved a little, and then turned her face toward Gilder.

"And, if I am, who made me one? You can't send a girl to prison, and have her come out anything else."

Burke swung himself around in a movement of complete disgust.

"She didn't get her time for good behavior."

Mary raised her head, haughtily, with a gesture of high disdain.

"And I'm proud of it!" came her instant retort. "Do you know what goes on there behind those stone walls? Do you, Mr. District Attorney, whose business it is to send girls there? Do you know what a girl is expected to do, to get time off for good behavior? If you don't, ask the keepers."

Gilder moved fussily.

"And you——"

Mary swayed a little, standing there before her questioner.

"I served every minute of my time—every minute of it, three full, whole years. Do you wonder that I want to get even, that some one has got to pay? Four years ago, you took away my name—and gave me a number. . . . Now, I've given up the number—and I've got your name."

CHAPTER XV.

AFTERMATH OF TRAGEDY.

The Gilders, both father and son, endured much suffering throughout the night and day that followed the scene in Mary Turner's apartment, when she had made known the accomplishment of her revenge on the older man by her ensnaring of the younger. Dick had followed the others out of her presence at her command, emphasized by her leaving him alone when he would have pleaded further with her. Since then, he had striven to obtain another interview with his bride, but she had refused him. He was denied admission to the apartment. Only the maid answered the ringing of the telephone, and his notes were seemingly unheeded. Distraught by this violent interjection of torment into a life that hitherto had known no important suffering, Dick Gilder showed what mettle of man lay beneath his debonair appearance. And that mettle was of a kind worth while. In these hours of grief, the soul of him put out its strength. He learned beyond peradventure of doubt that the woman whom he had married was in truth an ex-convict, even as Burke and Demarest had declared. Nevertheless, he did not for an instant believe that she was guilty of the crime with which she had been originally charged and for which she had served

a sentence in prison. For the rest, he could understand in some degree how the venom of the wrong inflicted on her had poisoned her nature through the years, till she had worked out its evil through the scheme of which he was the innocent victim. He cared little for the fact that recently she had devoted herself to devious devices for making money, to ingenious schemes for legal plunder. In his summing of her, he set as more than an offset to her unrighteousness in this regard the desperate struggle she had made after leaving prison to keep straight, which, as he learned, had ended in her attempt at suicide. He knew the intelligence of this woman whom he loved, and in his heart was no thought of her faults as vital flaws. It seemed to him rather that circumstances had compelled her, and that through all the suffering of her life she had retained the more beautiful qualities of her womanliness, for which he reverenced her. In the closeness of their association, short as it had been, he had learned to know something of the tenderer depths within her, the kindliness of her, the wholesomeness. Swayed as he was by the loveliness of her, he was yet more enthralled by those inner qualities of which the outer beauty was only the fitting symbol.

So, in the face of this catastrophe, where a less love must have been destroyed utterly, Dick remained loyal. His passionate regard did not falter for a moment. It never even occurred to him that he might cast her off, might yield to his father's prayers, and abandon her. On the contrary, his only purpose was to gain her for

himself, to cherish and guard her against every ill, to protect with his love from every attack of shame or injury. He would not believe that the girl did not care for him. Whatever had been her first purpose of using him only as an instrument through which to strike against his father, whatever might be her present plan of eliminating him from her life in the future, he still was sure that she had grown to know a real and lasting affection for himself. He remembered startled glances from the violet eyes, caught unawares, and the music of her voice in rare instants, and these told him that love for him stirred, even though it might as yet be but faintly, in her heart.

Out of that fact, he drew an immediate comfort in this period of his misery. Nevertheless, his anguish was a racking one. He grew older visibly in the night and the day. There crept suddenly lines of new feeling into his face, and, too, lines of new strength. The boy died in that time; the man was born, came forth in the full of his steadfastness and his courage, and his love.

The father suffered with the son. He was a proud man, intensely gratified over the commanding position to which he had achieved in the commercial world, proud of his business integrity, of his standing in the comunity as a leader, proud of his social position, proud most of all of the son whom he so loved. Now, this hideous disaster threatened his pride at every turn—worse, it threatened the one person in the world whom he really loved. Most fathers would have stormed at the boy when pleading failed, would have given com-

mands with harshness, would have menaced the recalcitrant with disinheritance. Edward Gilder did none of these things, though his heart was sorely wounded. He loved his son too much to contemplate making more evil for the lad by any estrangement between them. Yet he felt that the matter could not safely be left in the hands of Dick himself. He realized that his son loved the woman—nor could he wonder much at that. His keen eyes had perceived Mary Turner's graces of form, her loveliness of face. He had apprehended, too, in some measure at least, the fineness of her mental fiber and the capacities of her heart. Deep within him, denied any outlet, he knew there lurked a curious, subtle sympathy for the girl in her scheme of revenge against himself. Her persistent striving toward the object of her ambition was something he could understand, since the like thing in different guise had been back of his own business success. He would not let the idea rise to the surface of consciousness, for he still refused to believe that Mary Turner had suffered at his hand unjustly. He would think of her as nothing else than a vile creature, who had caught his son in the toils of her beauty and charm, for the purpose of eventually making money out of the intrigue.

Gilder, in his library this night, was pacing impatiently to and fro, eagerly listening for the sound of his son's return to the house. He had been the guest of honor that night at an important meeting of the Civic Committee, and he had spoken with his usual clarity and earnestness in spite of the trouble that beset him.

Now, however, the regeneration of the city was far from his thought, and his sole concern was with the regeneration of a life, that of his son, which bade fair to be ruined by the wiles of a wicked woman. He was anxious for the coming of Dick, to whom he would make one more appeal. If that should fail—well, he must use the influences at his command to secure the forcible parting of the adventuress from his son.

The room in which he paced to and fro was of a solid dignity, well fitted to serve as an environment for its owner. It was very large, and lofty. There was massiveness in the desk that stood opposite the hall door, near a window. This particular window itself was huge, high, jutting in octagonal, with leaded panes. In addition, there was a great fireplace set with tiles, around which was woodwork elaborately carved, the fruit of patient questing abroad. On the walls were hung some pieces of tapestry, where there were not bookcases. Over the octagonal window, too, such draperies fell in stately lines. Now, as the magnate paced back and forth, there was only a gentle light in the room, from a reading-lamp on his desk. The huge chandelier was unlighted. . . . It was even as Gilder, in an increasing irritation over the delay, had thrown himself down on a couch which stood just a little way within an alcove, that he heard the outer door open and shut. He sprang up with an ejaculation of satisfaction.

"Dick, at last!" he muttered.

It was, in truth, the son. A moment later, he entered

the room, and went at once to his father, who was standing waiting, facing the door.

"I'm awfully sorry I'm so late, Dad," he said simply.

"Where have you been?" the father demanded gravely. But there was great affection in the flash of his gray eyes as he scanned the young man's face, and the touch of the hand that he put on Dick's shoulder was very tender. "With that woman again?"

The boy's voice was disconsolate as he replied:

"No, father, not with her. She won't see me."

The older man snorted a wrathful appreciation.

"Naturally!" he exclaimed with exceeding bitterness in the heavy voice. "She's got all she wanted from you —my name!" He repeated the words with a grimace of exasperation: "My name!"

There was a novel dignity in the son's tone as he spoke.

"It's mine, too, you know, sir," he said quietly.

The father was impressed of a sudden with the fact that, while this affair was of supreme import to himself, it was, after all, of still greater significance to his son. To himself, the chief concerns were of the worldly kind. To this boy, the vital thing was something deeper, something of the heart: for, however absurd his feeling, the truth remained that he loved the woman. Yes, it was the son's name that Mary Turner had taken, as well as that of his father. In the case of the son, she had taken not only his name, but his very life. Yes, it was, indeed, Dick's tragedy. Whatever he, the father, might feel, the son was, after all, more affected. He

must suffer more, must lose more, must pay more with happiness for his folly.

Gilder looked at his son with a strange, new respect, but he could not let the situation go without protest, protest of the most vehement.

"Dick," he cried, and his big voice was shaken a little by the force of his emotion; "boy, you are all I have in the world. You will have to free yourself from this woman somehow." He stood very erect, staring steadfastly out of his clear gray eyes into those of his son. His heavy face was rigid with feeling; the coarse mouth bent slightly in a smile of troubled fondness, as he added more softly: "You owe me that much."

The son's eyes met his father's freely. There was respect in them, and affection, but there was something else, too, something the older man recognized as beyond his control. He spoke gravely, with a deliberate conviction.

"I owe something to her, too, Dad."

But Gilder would not let the statement go unchallenged. His heavy voice rang out rebukingly, overtoned with protest.

"What can you owe her?" he demanded indignantly. "She tricked you into the marriage. Why, legally, it's not even that. There's been nothing more than a wedding ceremony. The courts hold that that is only a part of the marriage actually. The fact that she doesn't receive you makes it simpler, too. It can be arranged. We must get you out of the scrape."

He turned and went to the desk, as if to sit, but he

was halted by his son's answer, given very gently, yet with a note of finality that to the father's ear rang like the crack of doom.

"I'm not sure that I want to get out of it, father."

That was all, but those plain words summed the situation, made the issue a matter not of advice, but of the heart.

Gilder persisted, however, in trying to evade the integral fact of his son's feeling. Still he tried to fix the issue on the known unsavory reputation of the woman.

"You want to stay married to this jail-bird!" he stormed.

A gust of fury swept the boy. He loved the woman, in spite of all; he respected her, even reverenced her. To hear her thus named moved him to a rage almost beyond his control. But he mastered himself. He remembered that the man who spoke loved him; he remembered, too, that the word of opprobrium was no more than the truth, however offensive it might be to his sensitiveness. He waited a moment until he could hold his voice even. Then his words were the sternest protest that could have been uttered, though they came from no exercise of thought, only out of the deeps of his heart.

"I'm very fond of her."

That was all. But the simple sincerity of the saying griped the father's mood, as no argument could have done. There was a little silence. After all, what could meet such loving loyalty?

When at last he spoke, Gilder's voice was subdued, a little husky.

"Now, that you know?" he questioned.

There was no faltering in the answer.

"Now, that I know," Dick said distinctly. Then abruptly, the young man spoke with the energy of perfect faith in the woman. "Don't you see, father? Why, she is justified in a way, in her own mind anyhow, I mean. She was innocent when she was sent to prison. She feels that the world owes her——"

But the older man would not permit the assertion to go uncontradicted. That reference to the woman's innocence was an arraignment of himself, for it had been he who sent her to the term of imprisonment.

"Don't talk to me about her innocence!" he said, and his voice was ominous. "I suppose next you will argue that, because she's been clever enough to keep within the law, since she's got out of State Prison, she's not a criminal. But let me tell you—crime is crime, whether the law touches it in the particular case, or whether it doesn't."

Gilder faced his son sternly for a moment, and then presently spoke again with deeper earnestness.

"There's only one course open to you, my boy. You must give this girl up."

The son met his father's gaze with a level look in which there was no weakness.

"I've told you, Dad——" he began.

"You must, I tell you," the father insisted. Then he went on quickly, with a tone of utmost positiveness. "If

you don't, what are you going to do the day your wife is thrown into a patrol wagon and carried to Police Headquarters—for it's sure to happen? The cleverest of people make mistakes, and some day she'll make one."

Dick threw out his hands in a gesture of supreme denial. He was furious at this supposition that she would continue in her irregular practises.

But the father went on remorselessly.

"They will stand her up where the detectives will walk past her with masks on their faces. Her picture, of course, is already in the Rogues' Gallery, but they will take another. Yes, and the imprints of her fingers, and the measurements of her body."

The son was writhing under the words. The woman of whom these things were said was the woman whom he loved. It was blasphemy to think of her in such case, subjected to the degradation of these processes. Yet, every word had in it the piercing, horrible sting of truth. His face whitened. He raised a supplicating hand.

"Father!"

"That's what they will do to your wife," Gilder went on harshly; "to the woman who bears your name and mine." There was a little pause, and the father stood rigid, menacing. The final question came rasping. "What are you going to do about it?"

Dick went forward until he was close to his father. Then he spoke with profound conviction.

"It will never happen. She will go straight, Dad.

That I know. You would know it if you only knew her as I do."

Gilder once again put his hand tenderly on his son's shoulder. His voice was modulated to an unaccustomed mildness as he spoke.

"Be sensible, boy," he pleaded softly. "Be sensible!"

Dick dropped down on the couch, and made his answer very gently, his eyes unseeing as he dwelt on the things he knew of the woman he loved.

"Why, Dad," he said, "she is young. She's just like a child in a hundred ways. She loves the trees and the grass and the flowers—and everything that's simple and real! And as for her heart—" His voice was low and very tender: "Why, her heart is the biggest I've ever known. It's just overflowing with sweetness and kindness. I've seen her pick up a baby that had fallen in the street, and mother it in a way that—well, no one could do it as she did it, unless her soul was clean."

The father was silent, a little awed. He made an effort to shake off the feeling, and spoke with a sneer.

"You heard what she said yesterday, and you still are such a fool as to think that."

The answer of the son came with an immutable finality, the sublime faith of love.

"I don't think—I know!"

Gilder was in despair. What argument could avail him? He cried out sharply in desperation.

"Do you realize what you're doing? Don't go to smash, Dick, just at the beginning of your life. Oh, I

beg you, boy, stop! Put this girl out of your thoughts and start fresh."

The reply was of the simplest, and it was the end of argument.

"Father," Dick said, very gently, "I can't."

There followed a little period of quiet between the two. The father, from his desk, stood facing his son, who thus denied him in all honesty because the heart so commanded. The son rested motionless and looked with unflinching eyes into his father's face. In the gaze of each was a great affection.

"You're all I have, my boy," the older man said at last. And now the big voice was a mildest whisper of love.

"Yes, Dad," came the answer—another whisper, since it is hard to voice the truth of feeling such as this. "If I could avoid it, I wouldn't hurt you for anything in the world. I'm sorry, Dad, awfully sorry——" He hesitated, then his voice rang out clearly. There was in his tone, when he spoke again, a recognition of that loneliness which is the curse and the crown of being:

"But," he ended, "I must fight this out by myself—fight it out in my own way. . . . And I'm going to do it!"

CHAPTER XVI.

BURKE PLOTS.

The butler entered.

"A man to see you, sir," he said.

Gilder made a gesture of irritation, as he sank into the chair at his desk.

"I can't see any one to-night, Thomas," he exclaimed, sharply.

"But he said it was most important, sir," the servant went on. He held out the tray insistently.

The master took the card grudgingly. As his eyes caught the name, his expression changed slightly.

"Very well," he said, "show him up." His glance met the wondering gaze of his son.

"It's Burke," he explained.

"What on earth can he want—at this time of night?" Dick exclaimed.

The father smiled grimly.

"You may as well get used to visits from the police." There was something ghastly in the effort toward playfulness.

A moment later, Inspector Burke entered the room.

"Oh, you're here, too," he said, as his eyes fell on Dick. "That's good. I wanted to see you, too."

Inspector Burke was, in fact, much concerned over

the situation that had developed. He was a man of undoubted ability, and he took a keen professional pride in his work. He possessed the faults of his class, was not too scrupulous where he saw a safe opportunity to make a snug sum of money through the employment of his official authority, was ready to truckle to those whose influence could help or hinder his ambition. But, in spite of these ordinary defects, he was fond of his work and wishful to excel in it. Thus, Mary Turner had come to be a thorn in his side. She flouted his authority and sustained her incredible effrontery by a restraining order from the court. The thing was outrageous to him, and he set himself to match her cunning. The fact that she had involved Dick Gilder within her toils made him the more anxious to overcome her in the strife of resources between them. After much studying, he had at last planned something that, while it would not directly touch Mary herself, would at least serve to intimidate her, and as well make further action easier against her. It was in pursuit of this scheme that he now came to Gilder's house, and the presence of the young man abruptly gave him another idea that might benefit him well. So, he disregarded Gilder's greeting, and went on speaking to the son.

"She's skipped!" he said, triumphantly.

Dick made a step forward. His eyes flashed, and there was anger in his voice as he replied:

"I don't believe it."

The Inspector smiled, unperturbed.

"She left this morning for Chicago," he said, lying

with a manner that long habit rendered altogether convincing. "I told you she'd go." He turned to the father, and spoke with an air of boastful good nature. "Now, all you have to do is to get this boy out of the scrape and you'll be all right."

"If we only could!" The cry came with deepest earnestness from the lips of Gilder, but there was little hope in his voice.

The Inspector, however, was confident of success, and his tones rang cheerfully as he answered:

"I guess we can find a way to have the marriage annulled, or whatever they do to marriages that don't take."

The brutal assurance of the man in thus referring to things that were sacred, moved Dick to wrath.

"Don't you interfere," he said. His words were spoken softly, but tensely.

Nevertheless, Burke held to the topic, but an indefinable change in his manner rendered it less offensive to the young man.

"Interfere! Huh!" he ejaculated, grinning broadly. "Why, that's what I'm paid to do. Listen to me, son. The minute you begin mixing up with crooks, you ain't in a position to give orders to any one. The crooks have got no rights in the eyes of the police. Just remember that."

The Inspector spoke the simple truth as he knew it from years of experience. The theory of the law is that a presumption of innocence exists until the accused is proven guilty. But the police are out of sympathy

with such finical methods. With them, the crook is presumed guilty at the outset of whatever may be charged against him. If need be, there will be proof a-plenty against him—of the sort that the underworld knows to its sorrow.

But Dick was not listening. His thoughts were again wholly with the woman he loved, who, as the Inspector declared, had fled from him.

"Where's she gone in Chicago?"

Burke answered in his usual gruff fashion, but with a note of kindliness that was not without its effect on Dick.

"I'm no mind-reader," he said. "But she's a swell little girl, all right. I've got to hand it to her for that. So, she'll probably stop at the Blackstone—that is, until the Chicago police are tipped off that she is in town."

Of a sudden, the face of the young man took on a totally different expression. Where before had been anger, now was a vivid eagerness. He went close to the Inspector, and spoke with intense seriousness.

"Burke," he said, pleadingly, "give me a chance. I'll leave for Chicago in the morning. Give me twenty-four hours start before you begin hounding her."

The Inspector regarded the speaker searchingly. His heavy face was drawn in an expression of apparent doubt. Abruptly, then, he smiled acquiescence.

"Seems reasonable," he admitted.

But the father strode to his son.

"No, no, Dick," he cried. "You shall not go! You shall not go!"

Burke, however, shook his head in remonstrance against Gilder's plea. His huge voice came booming, weightily impressive.

"Why not?" he questioned. "It's a fair gamble. And, besides, I like the boy's nerve."

Dick seized on the admission eagerly.

"And you'll agree?" he cried.

"Yes, I'll agree," the Inspector answered.

"Thank you," Dick said quietly.

But the father was not content. On the contrary, he went toward the two hurriedly, with a gesture of reproval.

"You shall not go, Dick," he declared, imperiously.

The Inspector shot a word of warning to Gilder in an aside that Dick could not hear.

"Keep still," he replied. "It's all right."

Dick went on speaking with a seriousness suited to the magnitude of his interests.

"You give me your word, Inspector," he said, "that you won't notify the police in Chicago until I've been there twenty-four hours?"

"You're on," Burke replied genially. "They won't get a whisper out of me until the time is up." He swung about to face the father, and there was a complete change in his manner. "Now, then, Mr. Gilder," he said briskly, "I want to talk to you about another little matter——"

Dick caught the suggestion, and interrupted quickly. "Then I'll go." He smiled rather wanly at his fath-

er. "You know, Dad, I'm sorry, but I've got to do what I think is the right thing."

Burke helped to save the situation from the growing tenseness.

"Sure," he cried heartily; "sure you have! That's the best any of us can do." He watched keenly as the young man went out of the room. It was not until the door was closed after Dick that he spoke. Then he dropped to a seat on the couch, and proceeded to make his confidences to the magnate.

"He'll go to Chicago in the morning, you think, don't you?"

"Certainly," Gilder answered. "But I don't like it."

Burke slapped his leg with an enthusiasm that might have broken a weaker member.

"Best thing that could have happened!" he vociferated. And then, as Gilder regarded him in astonishment, he added, chuckling: "You see, he won't find her there."

"Why do you think that?" Gilder demanded, greatly puzzled.

Burke permitted himself the luxury of laughing appreciatively a moment more before making his exclamation. Then he said quietly:

"Because she didn't go there."

"Where did she go, then?" Gilder queried, wholly at a loss.

Once again the officer chuckled. It was evident that he was well pleased with his own ingenuity.

"Nowhere yet," he said at last. "But, just about the

time he's starting for the West I'll have her down at Headquarters. Demarest will have her indicted before noon. She'll go for trial in the afternoon. And to-morrow night she'll be sleeping up the river. . . . That's where she is going."

Gilder stood motionless for a moment. After all, he was an ordinary citizen, quite unfamiliar with the recondite methods familiar to the police.

"But," he said, wonderingly, "you can't do that."

The Inspector laughed, a laugh of disingenuous amusement, for he understood perfectly the lack of comprehension on the part of his hearer.

"Well," he said, and his voice sank into a modest rumble that was none the less still thunderous. "Perhaps I can't!" And then he beamed broadly, his whole face smiling blandly on the man who doubted his power. "Perhaps I can't," he repeated. Then the chuckle came again, and he added emphatically: "But I will!" Suddenly, his heavy face grew hard. His alert eyes shone fiercely, with a flash of fire that was known to every patrolman who had ever reported to the desk when he was lieutenant. His heavy jaw shot forward aggressively as he spoke.

"Think I'm going to let that girl make a joke of the Police Department? Why, I'm here to get her—to stop her anyhow. Her gang is going to break into your house to-night."

"What?" Gilder demanded. "You mean, she's coming here as a thief?"

"Not exactly," Inspector Burke confessed, "but her

pals are coming to try to pull off something right here. She wouldn't come, not if I know her. She's too clever for that. Why, if she knew what Garson was planning to do, she'd stop him."

The Inspector paused suddenly. For a long minute his face was seamed with thought. Then, he smote his thigh with a blow strong enough to kill an ox. His face was radiant.

"By God! I've got her!" he cried. The inspiration for which he had longed was his at last. He went to the desk where the telephone was, and took up the receiver.

"Give me 3100 Spring," he said. As he waited for the connection he smiled widely on the astonished Gilder. "'Tain't too late," he said joyously. "I must have been losing my mind not to have thought of it before." The impact of sounds on his ear from the receiver set him to attention.

"Headquarters?" he called. "Inspector Burke speaking. Who's in my office? I want him quick." He smiled as he listened, and he spoke again to Gilder. "It's Smith, the best man I have. That's luck, if you ask me." Then again he spoke into the mouthpiece of the telephone.

"Oh, Ed, send some one up to that Turner woman. You have the address. Just see that she is tipped off that Joe Garson and some pals are going to break into Edward Gilder's house to-night. Get some stool-pigeon to hand her the information. You'd better get to work damned quick. Understand?"

The Inspector pulled out that watch of which Aggie Lynch had spoken so avariciously, and glanced at it, then went on speaking:

"It's ten-thirty now. She went to the Lyric Theater with some woman. Get her as she leaves, or find her back at her own place later. You'll have to hustle, anyhow. That's all!"

The Inspector hung up the receiver and faced his host with a contented smile.

"What good will all that do?" Gilder demanded, impatiently.

Burke explained with a satisfaction natural to one who had devised something ingenious and adequate. This inspiration filled him with delight. At last he was sure of catching Mary Turner herself in his toils.

"She'll come to stop 'em," he said. "When we get the rest of the gang, we'll grab her, too. Why, I almost forgot her, thinking about Garson. Mr. Gilder, you would hardly believe it, but there's scarcely been a real bit of forgery worth while done in this country for the last twenty years, that Garson hasn't been mixed up in. We've never once got him right in all that time." The Inspector paused to chuckle. "Crooks are funny," he explained with obvious contentment. "Clever as he is, Garson let Griggs talk him into a second-story job, and now we'll get him with the goods. . . . Just call your man for a minute, will you, Mr. Gilder?"

Gilder pressed the electric button on his desk. At the same moment, through the octagonal window came a blinding flash of light that rested for seconds, then

vanished. Burke, by no means a nervous man, nevertheless was startled by the mysterious radiance.

"What's that?" he demanded, sharply.

"It's the flashlight from the Metropolitan Tower," Gilder explained with a smile over the policeman's perturbation. "It swings around this way about every fifteen minutes. The servant forgot to draw the curtains." As he spoke, he went to the window, and pulled the heavy draperies close. "It won't bother us again."

The entrance of the butler brought the Inspector's thoughts back to the matter in hand.

"My man," he said, authoritatively, "I want you to go up to the roof and open the scuttle. You'll find some men waiting up there. Bring 'em down here."

The servant's usually impassive face showed astonishment, not unmixed with dismay, and he looked doubtfully toward his master, who nodded reassuringly.

"Oh, they won't hurt you," the Inspector declared, as he noticed the man's hesitation. "They're police officers. You get 'em down here, and then you go to bed and stay there till morning. Understand?"

Again, the butler looked at his master for guidance in this very peculiar affair, as he deemed it. Receiving another nod, he said:

"Very well, sir." He regarded the Inspector with a certain helpless indignation over this disturbance of the natural order, and left the room.

Gilder himself was puzzled over the situation, which was by no means clear to him.

"How do you know they're going to break into the

house to-night?" he demanded of Burke; "or do you only think they're going to break into the house?"

"I know they are." The Inspector's harsh voice brought out the words boastfully. "I fixed it."

"You did!" There was wonder in the magnate's exclamation.

"Sure," Burke declared complacently, "did it through a stool-pigeon."

"Oh, an informer," Gilder interrupted, a little doubtfully.

"Yes," Burke agreed. "Stool-pigeon is the police name for him. Really, he's the vilest thing that crawls."

"But, if you think that," Gilder expostulated, "why do you have anything to do with that sort of person?"

"Because it's good business," the Inspector replied. "We know he's a spy and a traitor, and that every time he comes near us we ought to use a disinfectant. But we deal with him just the same—because we have to. Now, the stool-pigeon in this trick is a swell English crook. He went to Garson yesterday with a scheme to rob your house. He tried out Mary Turner, too, but she wouldn't stand for it—said it would break the law, which is contrary to her principles. She told Garson to leave it alone. But he met Griggs afterward without her knowing anything about it, and then he agreed to pull it off. Griggs got word to me that it's coming off to-night. And so, you see, Mr. Gilder, that's how I know. Do you get me?"

"I see," Gilder admitted without any enthusiasm. As a matter of fact, he felt somewhat offended that his

house should be thus summarily seized as a trap for criminals.

"But why do you have your men come down over the roof?" he inquired curiously.

"It wasn't safe to bring them in the front way," was the Inspector's prompt reply. "It's a cinch the house is being watched. I wish you would let me have your latch-key. I want to come back, and make this collar myself."

The owner of the house obediently took the desired key from his ring and gave it to the Inspector with a shrug of resignation.

"But, why not stay, now that you are here?" he asked.

"Huh!" Burke retorted. "Suppose some of them saw me come in? There wouldn't be anything doing until after they see me go out again."

The hall door opened and the butler reëntered the room. Behind him came Cassidy and two other detectives in plain clothes. At a word from his master, the disturbed Thomas withdrew with the intention of obeying the Inspector's directions that he should retire to bed and stay there, carefully avoiding whatever possibilities of peril there might be in the situation so foreign to his ideals of propriety.

"Now," Burke went on briskly, as the door closed behind the servant, "where could these men stay out of sight until they're needed?"

There followed a little discussion which ended in the selection of a store-room at the end of the passage on

the ground floor, on which one of the library doors opened.

"You see," Burke explained to Gilder, when this matter had been settled to his satisfaction, and while Cassidy and the other detectives were out of the library on a tour of inspection, "you must have things right, when it comes to catching crooks on a frame-up like this. I had these men come to Number Twenty-six on the other street, then round the block on the roofs."

Gilder nodded appreciation which was not actually sincere. It seemed to him that such elaborate manœuvering was, in truth, rather absurd.

"And now, Mr. Gilder," the Inspector said energetically, "I'm going to give you the same tip I gave your man. Go to bed, and stay there."

"But the boy," Gilder protested. "What about him? He's the one thing of importance to me."

"If he says anything more about going to Chicago—just you let him go, that's all! It's the best place for him for the next few days. I'll get in touch with you in the morning and let you know then how things are coming out."

Gilder sighed resignedly. His heavy face was lined with anxiety. There was a hesitation in his manner of speech that was wholly unlike its usual quick decisiveness.

"I don't like this sort of thing," he said, doubtfully. "I let you go ahead because I can't suggest any alternative, but I don't like it, not at all. It seems to me that other methods might be employed with excellent re-

sults without the element of treachery which seems to involve me as well as you in our efforts to overcome this woman."

Burke, however, had no qualms as to such plotting.

"You must have crooked ways to catch crooks, believe me," he said cheerfully. "It's the easiest and quickest way out of the trouble for us, and the easiest and quickest way into trouble for them."

The return of the detectives caused him to break off, and he gave his attention to the final arrangements of his men.

"You're in charge here," he said to Cassidy, "and I hold you responsible. Now, listen to this, and get it." His coarse voice came with a grating note of command. "I'm coming back to get this bunch myself, and I'll call you when you're wanted. You'll wait in the store-room out there and don't make a move till you hear from me, unless by any chance things go wrong and you get a call from Griggs. You know who he is. He's got a whistle, and he'll use it if necessary. . . . Got that straight?" And, when Cassidy had declared an entire understanding of the directions given, he concluded concisely. "On your way, then!"

As the men left the room, he turned again to Gilder.

"Just one thing more," he said. "I'll have to have your help a little longer. After I've gone, I want you to stay up for a half-hour anyhow, with the lights burning. Do you see? I want to be sure to give the Turner woman time to get here while that gang is at work. Your keeping on the lights will hold them back, for

they won't come in till the house is dark, so, in half an hour you can get off the job, switch off the lights and go to bed and stay there—just as I told you before." Then Inspector Burke, having in mind the great distress of the man over the unfortunate entanglement of his son, was at pains to offer a reassuring word.

"Don't worry about the boy," he said, with grave kindliness. "We'll get him out of this scrape all right." And with the assertion he bustled out, leaving the unhappy father to miserable forebodings.

CHAPTER XVII.

OUTSIDE THE LAW.

Gilder scrupulously followed the directions of the Police Inspector. Uneasily, he had remained in the library until the allotted time was elapsed. He fidgeted from place to place, his mind heavy with distress under the shadow that threatened to blight the life of his cherished son. Finally, with a sense of relief he put out the lights and went to his chamber. But he did not follow the further directions given him, for he was not minded to go to bed. Instead, he drew the curtains closely to make sure that no gleam of light could pass them, and then sat with a cigar between his lips, which he did not smoke, though from time to time he was at pains to light it. His thoughts were most with his son, and ever as he thought of Dick, his fury waxed against the woman who had enmeshed the boy in her plotting for vengeance on himself. And into his thoughts now crept a doubt, one that alarmed his sense of justice. It occurred to him that this woman could not have thus nourished a plan for retribution through the years unless, indeed, she had been insane, even as he had claimed—or innocent! The idea was appalling. He could not bear to admit the possibility of having been the involuntary inflicter of such wrong as to send the girl to

prison for an offense she had not committed. He rejected the suggestion, but it persisted. He knew the clean, wholesome nature of his son. It seemed to him incredible that the boy could have thus given his heart to one altogether undeserving. A horrible suspicion that he had misjudged Mary Turner crept into his brain, and would not out. He fought it with all the strength of him, and that was much, but ever it abode there. He turned for comfort to the things Burke had said. The woman was a crook, and there was an end of it. Her ruse of spoliation within the law was evidence of her shrewdness, nothing more.

Mary Turner herself, too, was in a condition utterly wretched, and for the same cause—Dick Gilder. That source of the father's suffering was hers as well. She had won her ambition of years, revenge on the man who had sent her to prison. And now the joy of it was a torture, for the puppet of her plans, the son, had suddenly become the chief thing in her life. She had taken it for granted that he would leave her after he came to know that her marriage to him was only a device to bring shame on his father. Instead, he loved her. That fact seemed the secret of her distress. He loved her. More, he dared believe, and to assert boldly, that she loved him. Had he acted otherwise, the matter would have been simple enough. . . . But he loved her, loved her still, though he knew the shame that had clouded her life, knew the motive that had led her to accept him as a husband. More—by a sublime audacity, he declared that she loved him.

There came a thrill in her heart each time she thought of that—that she loved him. The idea was monstrous, of course, and yet—— Here, as always, she broke off, a hot flush blazing in her cheeks. . . . Nevertheless, such curious fancies pursued her through the hours. She strove her mightiest to rid herself of them, but in vain. Ever they persisted. She sought to oust them by thinking of any one else, of Aggie, of Joe. There at last was satisfaction. Her interference between the man who had saved her life and the temptation of the English crook had prevented a dangerous venture, which might have meant ruin to the one whom she esteemed for his devotion to her, if for no other reason. At least, she had kept him from the outrageous folly of an ordinary burglary.

Mary Turner was just ready for bed after her evening at the theater, when she was rudely startled out of this belief. A note came by a messenger who waited for no answer, as he told the yawning maid. As Mary read the roughly scrawled message, she was caught in the grip of terror. Some instinct warned her that this danger was even worse than it seemed. The man who had saved her from death had yielded to temptation. Even now, he was engaged in committing that crime which she had forbidden him. As he had saved her, so she must save him. She hurried into the gown she had just put off. Then she went to the telephone-book and searched for the number of Gilder's house.

* * * * *

It was just a few moments before Mary Turner re-

ceived the note from the hands of the sleepy maid that one of the leaves of the octagonal window in the library of Richard Gilder's town house swung open, under the persuasive influence of a thin rod of steel, cunningly used, and Joe Garson stepped confidently into the dark room.

A faint radiance of moonlight from without showed him for a second as he passed between the heavy draperies. Then these fell into place, and he was invisible, and soundless as well. For a space, he rested motionless, listening intently. Reassured, he drew out an electric torch and set it glowing. A little disc of light touched here and there about the room, traveling very swiftly, and in methodical circles. Satisfied by the survey, Garson crossed to the hall door. He moved with alert assurance, lithely balanced on the balls of his feet, noiselessly. At the hall door he listened for any sound of life without, and found none. The door into the passage that led to the store-room where the detectives waited next engaged his business-like attention. And here, again, there was naught to provoke his suspicion.

These preliminaries taken as measures of precaution, Garson went boldly to the small table that stood behind the couch, turned the button, and the soft glow of an electric lamp illumined the apartment. The extinguished torch was thrust back into his pocket. Afterward he carried one of the heavy chairs to the door of the passage and propped it against the panel in such wise that its fall must give warning as to the opening

of the door. His every action was performed with the maximum of speed, with no least trace of flurry or of nervous haste. It was evident that he followed a definite program, the fruit of precise thought guided by experience.

It seemed to him that now everything was in readiness for the coming of his associates in the commission of the crime. There remained only to give them the signal in the room around the corner where they waited at a telephone. He seated himself in Gilder's chair at the desk, and drew the telephone to him.

"Give me 999 Bryant," he said. His tone was hardly louder than a whisper, but spoken with great distinctness.

There was a little wait. Then an answer in a voice he knew came over the wire.

But Garson said nothing more. Instead, he picked up a penholder from the tray on the desk, and began tapping lightly on the rim of the transmitter. It was a code message in Morse. In the room around the corner, the tapping sounded clearly, ticking out the message that the way was free for the thieves' coming.

When Garson had made an end of the telegraphing, there came a brief answer in like Morse, to which he returned a short direction.

For a final safeguard, Garson searched for and found the telephone bell-box on the surbase below the octagonal window. It was the work of only a few seconds to unscrew the bells, which he placed on the desk. So simply he made provision against any alarm from this

source. He then took his pistol from his hip-pocket, examined it to make sure that the silencer was properly adjusted, and then thrust it into the right side-pocket of his coat, ready for instant use in desperate emergency. Once again, now, he produced the electric torch, and lighted it as he extinguished the lamp on the table.

Forthwith, Garson went to the door into the hall, opened it, and, leaving it ajar, made his way in silence to the outer doorway. Presently, the doors there were freed of their bolts under his skilled fingers, and one of them swung wide. He had put out the torch now, lest its gleam might catch the gaze of some casual passer-by. So nicely had the affair been timed that hardly was the door open before the three men slipped in, and stood mute and motionless in the hall, while Garson refastened the doors. Then, a pencil of light traced the length of the hallway and Garson walked quickly back to the library. Behind him with steps as noiseless as his own came the three men to whom he had just given the message.

When all were gathered in the library, Garson shut the hall door, touched the button in the wall beside it, and the chandelier threw its radiant light on the group.

Griggs was in evening clothes, seeming a very elegant young gentleman indeed, but his two companions were of grosser type, as far as appearances went: one, Dacey, thin and wiry, with a ferret face; the other, Chicago Red, a brawny ruffian, whose stolid features nevertheless exhibited something of half-sullen good nature.

"Everything all right so far," Garson said rapidly.

He turned to Griggs and pointed toward the heavy hangings that shrouded the octagonal window. "Are those the things we want?" he demanded.

"Yes," was the answer of English Eddie.

"Well, then, we've got to get busy," Garson went on. His alert, strong face was set in lines of eagerness that had in it something of fierceness now.

But, before he could add a direction, he was halted by a soft buzzing from the telephone, which, though bell-less, still gave this faint warning of a call. For an instant, he hesitated while the others regarded him doubtfully. The situation offered perplexities. To give no attention to the summons might be perilous, and failure to respond might provoke investigation in some urgent matter; to answer it might easily provide a larger danger.

"We've got to take a chance." Garson spoke his decision curtly. He went to the desk and put the receiver to his ear.

There came again the faint tapping of some one at the other end of the line, signaling a message in the Morse code. An expression of blank amazement, which grew in a flash to deep concern, showed on Garson's face as he listened tensely.

"Why, this is Mary calling," he muttered.

"Mary!" Griggs cried. His usual vacuity of expression was cast off like a mask and alarm twisted his features. Then, in the next instant, a crafty triumph gleamed from his eyes.

"Yes, she's on," Garson interpreted, a moment later,

as the tapping ceased for a little. He translated in a loud whisper as the irregular ticking noise sounded again.

"I shall be there at the house almost at once. I am sending this message from the drug store around the corner. Have some one open the door for me immediately."

"She's coming over," Griggs cried incredulously.

"No, I'll stop her," Garson declared firmly.

"Right! Stop her," Chicago Red vouchsafed.

But, when, after tapping a few words, the forger paused for the reply, no sound came.

"She don't answer," he exclaimed, greatly disconcerted. He tried again, still without result. At that, he hung up the receiver with a groan. "She's gone——"

"On her way already," Griggs suggested, and there was none to doubt that it was so.

"What's she coming here for?" Garson exclaimed harshly. "This ain't no place for her! Why, if anything should go wrong now——"

But Griggs interrupted him with his usual breezy cheerfulness of manner.

"Oh, nothing can go wrong now, old top. I'll let her in." He drew a small torch from the skirt-pocket of his coat and crossed to the hall door, as Garson nodded assent.

"God! Why did she have to come?" Garson muttered, filled with forebodings. "If anything should go wrong now!"

He turned back toward the door just as it opened,

and Mary darted into the room with Griggs following.

"What do you want here?" he demanded, with peremptory savageness in his voice, which was a tone he had never hitherto used in addressing her.

Mary went swiftly to face Garson where he stood by the desk, while Griggs joined the other two men who stood shuffling about uneasily by the fireplace, at a loss over this intrusion on their scheme. Mary moved with a lissome grace like that of some wild creature, but as she halted opposite the man who had given her back the life she would have thrown away, there was only tender pleading in her voice, though her words were an arraignment.

"Joe, you lied to me."

"That can be settled later," the man snapped. His jaw was thrust forward obstinately, and his clear eyes sparkled defiantly.

"You are fools, all of you!" Mary cried. Her eyes darkened and distended with fear. They darted from Garson to the other three men, and back again in rebuke. "Yes, fools! This is burglary. I can't protect you if you are caught. How can I? Oh, come!" She held out her hands pleadingly toward Garson, and her voice dropped to beseeching. "Joe, Joe, you must get away from this house at once, all of you. Joe, make them go."

"It's too late," was the stern answer. There was no least relaxation in the stubborn lines of his face. "We're here now, and we'll stay till the business is done."

Mary went a step forward. The cloak she was wear-

ing was thrown back by her gesture of appeal so that those watching saw the snowy slope of the shoulders and the quick rise and fall of the gently curving bosom. The beautiful face within the framing scarf was colorless with a great fear, save only the crimson lips, of which the bow was bent tremulously as she spoke her prayer.

"Joe, for my sake!"

But the man was inexorable. He had set himself to this thing, and even the urging of the one person in the world for whom he most cared was powerless against his resolve.

"I can't quit now until we've got what we came here after," he declared roughly.

Of a sudden, the girl made shift to employ another sort of supplication.

"But there are reasons," she said, faltering. A certain embarrassment swept her, and the ivory of her cheeks bloomed rosily. "I—I can't have you rob this house, this particular house of all the world." Her eyes leaped from the still obdurate face of the forger to the group of three back of him. Her voice was shaken with a great dread as she called out to them.

"Boys, let's get away! Please, oh, please! Joe, for God's sake!" Her tone was a sob.

Her anguish of fear did not swerve Garson from his purpose.

"I'm going to see this through," he said, doggedly.

"But, Joe——"

"It's settled, I tell you."

In the man's emphasis the girl realized at last the inefficacy of her efforts to combat his will. She seemed to droop visibly before their eyes. Her head sank on her breast. Her voice was husky as she tried to speak.

"Then——" She broke off with a gesture of despair, and turned away toward the door by which she had entered.

But, with a movement of great swiftness, Garson got in front of her, and barred her going. For a few seconds the two stared at each other searchingly as if learning new and strange things, each of the other. In the girl's expression was an outraged wonder and a great terror. In the man's was a half-shamed pride, as if he exulted in the strength with which he had been able to maintain his will against her supreme effort to overthrow it.

"You can't go," Garson said sharply. "You might be caught."

"And if I were," Mary demanded in a flash of indignation, "do you think I'd tell?"

There came an abrupt change in the hard face of the man. Into the piercing eyes flamed a softer fire of tenderness. The firm mouth grew strangely gentle as he replied, and his voice was overtoned with faith.

"Of course not, Mary," he said. "I know you. You would go up for life first."

Then again his expression became resolute, and he spoke imperiously.

"Just the same, you can't take any chances. We'll

all get away in a minute, and you'll come with us." He turned to the men and spoke with swift authority.

"Come," he said to Dacey, "you get to the light switch there by the hall door. If you hear me snap my fingers, turn 'em off. Understand?"

With instant obedience, the man addressed went to his station by the hall door, and stood ready to control the electric current.

The distracted girl essayed one last plea. The momentary softening of Garson had given her new courage.

"Joe, don't do this."

"You can't stop it now, Mary," came the brisk retort. "Too late. You're only wasting time, making it dangerous for all of us."

Again he gave his attention to carrying on the robbery.

"Red," he ordered, "you get to that door." He pointed to the one that gave on the passageway against which he had set the chair tilted. As the man obeyed, Garson gave further instructions.

"If any one comes in that way, get him and get him quick. You understand? Don't let him cry out."

Chicago Red grinned with cheerful acceptance of the issue in such an encounter. He held up his huge hand, widely open.

"Not a chance," he declared, proudly, "with that over his mug." To avoid possible interruption of his movements in an emergency, he removed the chair Garson had placed and set it to one side, out of the way.

"Now, let's get to work," Garson continued eagerly.

Mary spoke with the bitterness of defeat.

"Listen, Joe! If you do this, I'm through with you. I quit."

Garson was undismayed by the threat.

"If this goes through," he countered, "we'll all quit. That's why I'm doing it. I'm sick of the game."

He turned to the work in hand with increased energy.

"Come, you, Griggs and Red, and push that desk down a bit so that I can stand on it." The two men bent to the task, heedless of Mary's frantic protest.

"No! no! no! no! no, Joe!"

Red, however, suddenly straightened from the desk and stood motionless, listening. He made a slight hissing noise that arrested the attention of the others and held them in moveless silence.

"I hear something," he whispered. He went to the keyhole of the door leading into the passage. Then he whispered again, "And it's coming this way."

At the words, Garson snapped his fingers. The room was plunged in darkness.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE NOISELESS DEATH.

There was absolute silence in the library after the turning of the switch that brought the pall of darkness. Long seconds passed, then a little noise—the knob of the passage door turning. As the door swung open, there came a gasping breath from Mary, for she saw framed in the faint light that came from the single burner in the corridor the slender form of her husband, Dick Gilder. In the next instant he had stepped within the room and pulled to the door behind him. And in that same instant Chicago Red had pounced on his victim, the huge hand clapped tight over the young man's mouth. Even as his powerful arm held the newcomer in an inescapable embrace, there came a sound of scuffling feet and that was all. Finally the big man's voice came triumphantly.

"I've got him."

"It's Dick!" The cry came as a wail of despair from the girl.

At the same moment, Garson flashed his torch, and the light fell swiftly on young Gilder, bowed to a kneeling posture before the couch, half-throttled by the strength of Chicago Red. Close beside him, Mary looked down in wordless despair over this final disaster

of the night. There was silence among the men, all of whom save the captor himself were gathered near the fireplace.

Garson retired a step farther before he spoke his command, so that, though he held the torch still, he like the others was in shadow. Only Mary was revealed clearly as she bent in alarm toward the man she had married. It was borne in on the forger's consciousness that the face of the woman leaning over the intruder was stronger to hold the prisoner and to prevent any outcry than the might of Chicago Red himself, and so he gave the order.

"Get away, Red."

The fellow let go his grip obediently enough, though with a trifle of regret, since he gloried in his physical prowess.

Thus freed of that strangling embrace, Dick stumbled blindly to his feet. Then, mechanically, his hand went to the lamp on the table back of the couch. In the same moment Garson snapped his torch to darkness. When, after a little futile searching, Dick finally found the catch, and the mellow streamed forth, he uttered an ejaculation of stark amazement, for his gaze was riveted on the face of the woman he loved.

"Good God!" It was a cry of torture wrung from his soul of souls.

Mary swayed toward him a little, palpitant with fear —fear for herself, for all of them, most of all for him.

"Hush! hush!" she panted warningly. "Oh, Dick, you don't understand."

Dick's hand was at his throat. It was not easy for him to speak yet. He had suffered severely in the process of being throttled, and, too, he was in the clutch of a frightful emotion. To find her, his wife, in this place, in such company—her, the woman whom he loved, whom, in spite of everything, he had honored, the woman to whom he had given his name! Mary here! And thus!

"I understand this," he said brokenly at last. "Whether you ever did it before or not, this time you have broken the law." A sudden inspiration on his own behalf came to him. For his love's sake, he must seize on this opportunity given of fate to him for mastery. He went on with a new vehemence of boldness that became him well.

"You're in my hands now. So are these men as well. Unless you do as I say, Mary, I'll jail every one of them."

Mary's usual quickness was not lacking even now, in this period of extremity. Her retort was given without a particle of hesitation.

"You can't," she objected with conviction. "I'm the only one you've seen."

"That's soon remedied," Dick declared. He turned toward the hall door as if with the intention of lighting the chandelier.

But Mary caught his arm pleadingly.

"Don't, Dick," she begged. "It's—it's not safe."

"I'm not afraid," was his indignant answer. He would have gone on, but she clung the closer. He was

reluctant to use over-much force against the one whom he cherished so fondly.

There came a diversion from the man who had made the capture, who was mightily wondering over the course of events, which was wholly unlike anything in the whole of his own rather extensive housebreaking experience.

"Who's this, anyhow?" Chicago Red demanded.

There was a primitive petulance in his drawling tones.

Dick answered with conciseness enough.

"I'm her husband. Who are you?"

Mary called a soft admonition.

"Don't speak, any of you," she directed. "You mustn't let him hear your voices."

Dick was exasperated by this persistent identification of herself with these criminals in his father's house.

"You're fighting me like a coward," he said hotly. His voice was bitter. The eyes that had always been warm in their glances on her were chill now. He turned a little way from her, as if in instinctive repugnance. "You are taking advantage of my love. You think that because of it I can't make a move against these men. Now, listen to me, I——"

"I won't!" Mary cried. Her words were shrill with mingled emotions. "There's nothing to talk about," she went on wildly. "There never can be between you and me."

The young man's voice came with a sonorous firmness that was new to it. In these moments, the strength of

him, nourished by suffering, was putting forth its flower. His manner was masterful.

"There can be and there will be," he contradicted. He raised his voice a little, speaking into the shadows where was the group of silent men.

"You men back there!" he cried. "If I give you my word to let every one of you go free and pledge myself never to recognize one of you again, will you make Mary here listen to me? That's all I ask. I want a few minutes to state my case. Give me that. Whether I win or lose, you men go free, and I'll forget everything that has happened here to-night." There came a muffled guffaw of laughter from the big chest of Chicago Red at this extraordinarily ingenuous proposal, while Dacey chuckled more quietly.

Dick made a gesture of impatience at this open derision.

"Tell them I can be trusted," he bade Mary curtly.

It was Garson who answered.

"I know that you can be trusted," he said, "because I know you lo——" He checked himself with a shiver, and out of the darkness his face showed white.

"You must listen," Dick went on, facing again toward the girl, who was trembling before him, her eyes by turns searching his expression or downcast in unfamiliar confusion, which she herself could hardly understand.

"Your safety depends on me," the young man warned. "Suppose I should call for help?"

Garson stepped forward threateningly.

"You would only call once," he said very gently, yet

most grimly. His hand went to the noiseless weapon in his coat-pocket.

But the young man's answer revealed the fact that he, too, was determined to the utmost, that he understood perfectly the situation.

"Once would be quite enough," he said simply.

Garson nodded in acceptance of the defeat. It may be, too, that in some subtle fashion he admired this youth suddenly grown resolute, competent to control a dangerous event. There was even the possibility that some instinct of tenderness toward Mary herself made him desire that this opportunity should be given for wiping out the effects of misfortune which fate hitherto had brought into her life.

"You win," Garson said, with a half-laugh. He turned to the other men and spoke a command.

"You get over by the hall door, Red. And keep your ears open every second. Give us the office if you hear anything. If we're rushed, and have to make a quick get-away, see that Mary has the first chance. Get that, all of you?"

As Chicago Red took up his appointed station, Garson turned to Dick.

"Make it quick, remember."

He touched the other two and moved back to the wall by the fireplace, as far as possible from the husband and wife by the couch.

Dick spoke at once, with a hesitancy that betrayed the depth of his emotion.

"Don't you care for me at all?" he asked wistfully.

The girl's answer was uttered with nervous eagerness which revealed her own stress of fear.

"No, no, no!" she exclaimed, rebelliously.

Now, however, the young man had regained some measure of reassurance.

"I know you do, Mary," he asserted, confidently; "a little, anyway. Why, Mary," he went on reproachfully, "can't you see that you're throwing away everything that makes life worth while? Don't you see that?"

There was no word from the girl. Her breast was moving convulsively. She held her face steadfastly averted from the face of her husband.

"Why don't you answer me?" he insisted.

Mary's reply came with all the coldness she could command.

"That was not in the bargain," Mary said, indifferently.

The man's voice grew tenderly winning, persuasive with the longing of a lover, persuasive with the pity of the righteous for the sinner.

"Mary, Mary!" he cried. "You've got to change. Don't be so hard. Give the woman in you a chance."

The girl's form became rigid as she fought for self-control. The plea touched to the bottom of her heart, but she could not, would not yield. Her words rushed forth with a bitterness that was the cover of her distress.

"I am what I am," she said sharply. "I can't change. Keep your promise, now, and let's get out of this."

"MARY, HAVEN'T YOU EVER WANTED THE THINGS THAT OTHER WOMEN HAVE . . . SHELTER, AND CARE, AND THE BIG THINGS OF LIFE, THE THINGS WORTH WHILE? THEY'RE ALL READY FOR YOU NOW, MARY."

Her assertion was disregarded as to the inability to change.

"You can change," Dick went on impetuously. "Mary, haven't you ever wanted the things that other women have, shelter, and care, and the big things of life, the things worth while? They're all ready for you, now, Mary. . . . And what about me?" Reproach leaped in his tone. "After all, you've married me. Now it's up to you to give me my chance to make good. I've never amounted to much. I've never tried much. I shall, now, if you will have it so, Mary; if you'll help me. I will come out all right, I know that—so do you, Mary. Only, you must help me."

"I help you!" The exclamation came from the girl in a note of incredulous astonishment.

"Yes," Dick said, simply. "I need you, and you need me. Come away with me."

"No, no!" was the broken refusal. There was a great grief clutching at the soul of this woman who had brought vengeance to its full flower. She was gasping. "No, no! I married you, not because I loved you, but to repay your father the wrong he had done me. I wouldn't let myself even think of you, and then—I realized that I had spoiled your life."

"No, not spoiled it, Mary! Blessed it! We must prove that yet."

"Yes, spoiled it," the wife went on passionately. "If I had understood, if I could have dreamed that I could ever care—— Oh, Dick, I would never have married you for anything in the world."

"But now you do realize," the young man said quietly. "The thing is done. If we made a mistake, it is for us to bring happiness out of that error."

"Oh, can't you see?" came the stricken lament. "I'm a jail-bird!"

"But you love me—you do love me, I know!" The young man spoke with joyous certainty, for some inflection of her voice had told the truth to his heart. Nothing else mattered. "But now, to come back to this hole we're in here. Don't you understand, at last, that you can't beat the law? If you're caught here to-night, where would you get off—caught here with a gang of burglars? Tell me, dear, why did you do it? Why didn't you protect yourself? Why didn't you go to Chicago as you planned?"

"What?" There was a new quality in Mary's voice. A sudden throb of shock masked in the surface indifference of intonation.

Dick repeated his question, unobservant of its first effect.

"Why didn't you go to Chicago as you had planned?"

"Planned? With whom?" The interrogation came with an abrupt force that cried of new suspicions.

"Why, with Burke." The young man tried to be patient over her density in this time of crisis.

"Who told you that I had arranged any such thing?" Mary asked. Now the tenseness in her manner got the husband's attention, and he replied with a sudden gravity, apprehensive of he knew not what.

"Burke himself did."

"When?" Mary was standing rigid now, and the rare color flamed in her cheeks. Her eyes were blazing.

"Less than an hour ago." He had caught the contagion of her mood and vague alarm swept him.

"Where?" came the next question, still with that vital insistence.

"In this room."

"Burke was here?" Mary's voice was suddenly cold, very dangerous. "What was he doing here?"

"Talking to my father."

The seemingly simple answer appeared the last straw to the girl's burden of frenzied suspicion. Her voice cut fiercely into the quiet of the room, imperious, savage.

"Joe, turn on that light! I want to see the face of every man in this room."

Something fatally significant in her voice set Garson a-leap to the switch, and, in the same second, the blaze of the chandelier flamed brilliantly over all. The others stood motionless, blinking in the sudden radiance—all save Griggs, who moved stealthily in that same moment, a little nearer the door into the passage, which was nearest to him.

But Mary's next words came wholly as a surprise, seemingly totally irrelevant to this instant of crisis. Yet they rang a-throb with an hysterical anxiety.

"Dick," she cried, "what are those tapestries worth?" With the question, she pointed toward the draperies that shrouded the great octagonal window.

The young man was plainly astonished, disconcerted

as well by the obtrusion of a sordid detail into the tragedy of the time.

"Why in the world do you——?" he began, impatiently.

Mary stamped her foot angrily in protest against the delay.

"Tell me—quick!" she commanded. The authority in her voice and manner was not to be gainsaid.

Dick yielded sullenly.

"Oh, two or three hundred dollars, I suppose," he answered. "Why?"

"Never mind that!" Mary exclaimed, violently. And now the girl's voice came stinging like a whiplash. In Garson's face, too, was growing fury, for in an instant of illumination he guessed something of the truth. Mary's next question confirmed his raging suspicion.

"How long have you had them, Dick?"

By now, the young man himself sensed the fact that something mysteriously baneful lay behind the frantic questioning on this seemingly trivial theme.

"Ever since I can remember," he replied, promptly.

Mary's voice came then with an intonation that brought enlightenment not only to Garson's shrewd perceptions, but also to the heavier intelligences of Dacey and of Chicago Red.

"And they're not famous masterpieces which your father bought recently, from some dealer who smuggled them into this country?" So simple were the words of her inquiry, but under them beat something evil, deadly.

The young man laughed contemptuously.

"I should say not!" he declared indignantly, for he resented the implication against his father's honesty.

"It's a trick! Burke's done it!" Mary's words came with accusing vehemence.

There was another single step made by Griggs toward the door into the passage.

Mary's eye caught the movement, and her lips soundlessly formed the name:

"Griggs!"

The man strove to carry off the situation, though he knew well that he stood in mortal peril. He came a little toward the girl who had accused him of treachery. He was very dapper in his evening clothes, with his rather handsome, well-groomed face set in lines of innocence.

"He's lying to you!" he cried forcibly, with a scornful gesture toward Dick Gilder. "I tell you, those tapestries are worth a million cold."

Mary's answer was virulent in its sudden burst of hate. For once, the music of her voice was lost in a discordant cry of detestation.

"You stool-pigeon! You did this for Burke!"

Griggs sought still to maintain his air of innocence, and he strove well, since he knew that he fought for his life against those whom he had outraged. As he spoke again, his tones were tremulous with sincerity—perhaps that tremulousness was born chiefly of fear, yet to the ear his words came stoutly enough for truth:

"I swear I didn't! I swear it!"

Mary regarded the protesting man with abhorrence. The perjured wretch shrank before the loathing in her eyes.

"You came to me yesterday," she said, with more of restraint in her voice now, but still with inexorable rancor. "You came to me to explain this plan. And you came from him—from Burke!"

"I swear I was on the level. I was tipped off to the story by a pal," Griggs declared, but at last the assurance was gone out of his voice. He felt the hostility of those about him.

Garson broke in ferociously.

"It's a frame-up!" he said. His tones came in a deadened roar of wrath.

On the instant, aware that further subterfuge could be of no avail, Griggs swaggered defiance.

"And what if it is true?" he drawled, with a resumption of his aristocratic manner, while his eyes swept the group balefully. He plucked the police whistle from his waistcoat-pocket, and raised it to his lips.

He moved too slowly. In the same moment of his action, Garson had pulled the pistol from his pocket, had pressed the trigger. There came no spurt of flame. There was no sound—save perhaps a faint clicking noise. But the man with the whistle at his lips suddenly ceased movement, stood absolutely still for the space of a breath. Then, he trembled horribly, and in the next instant crashed to the floor, where he lay rigid, dead.

"Damn you—I've got you!" Garson sneered through clenched teeth. His eyes were like balls of fire. There

was a frightful grin of triumph twisting his mouth in this minute of punishment.

In the first second of the tragedy, Dick had not understood. Indeed, he was still dazed by the suddenness of it all. But the falling of Griggs before the leveled weapon of the other man, there to lie in that ghastly immobility, made him to understand. He leaped toward Garson—would have wrenched the pistol from the other's grasp. In the struggle, it fell to the floor.

Before either could pick it up, there came an interruption. Even in the stress of this scene, Chicago Red had never relaxed his professional caution. A slight noise had caught his ear, he had stooped, listening. Now, he straightened, and called his warning.

"Somebody's opening the front door!"

Garson forgot his weapon in this new alarm. He sprang to the octagonal window, even as Dick took possession of the pistol.

"The street's empty! We must jump for it!" His hate was forgotten now in an emotion still deeper, and he turned to Mary. His face was all gentleness again, where just before it had been evil incarnate, aflame with the lust to destroy. "Come on, Mary," he cried.

Already Chicago Red had snapped off the lights of the chandelier, had sprung to the window, thrown open a panel of it, and had vanished into the night, with Dacey at his heels. As Garson would have called out to the girl again in mad anxiety for haste, he was interrupted by Dick:

"She couldn't make it, Garson," he declared coolly,

and resolutely. "You go. It'll be all right, you know. I'll take care of her!"

"If she's caught——!" There was an indescribable menace in the forger's half-uttered threat.

"She won't be." The quality of sincerity in Dick's voice was more convincing than any vow might have been.

"If she is, I'll get you, that's all," Garson said gravely, as one stating a simple fact that could not be disputed.

Then he glanced down at the body of the man whom he had done to death.

"And you can tell that to Burke!" he said viciously to the dead. "You damned squealer!" There was a supremely malevolent content in his sneer.

CHAPTER XIX.

WITHIN THE TOILS.

The going of Garson left the room deathly still. Dick stared for a moment at the space of window left uncovered by the draperies now, since the man had hurried past them, without pausing to draw them after him. Then, presently, the young man turned again to Mary, and took her hand in his. The shock of the event had somehow steadied him, since it had drawn his thoughts from that other more engrossing mood of concern over the crisis in his own life. After all, what mattered the death of this crook? his fancy ran. The one thing of real worth in all the world was the life that remained to be lived between him and her. . . . Then, violently, the selfishness of his mood was made plain to him. For the hand he held was shaking like some slender-stalked lily in the clutch of the sirocco. Even as he first perceived the fact, he saw the girl stagger. His arm swept about her in a virile protecting embrace—just in time, or she would have fallen.

A whisper came from her quivering lips. Her face was close to his, else he could not have caught the uncertain murmuring. That face now was become ghastly pale. The violet eyes were widened and dull. The muscles of her face twitched. She rested supinely

against him, as if bereft of any strength of body or of soul. Yet, in the intensity of her utterance, the feeble whisper struck like a shriek of horror.

"I—I—never saw any one killed before!"

The simple, grisly truth of the words—words that he might have spoken as well—stirred the man to the deeps of his being. He shuddered, as he turned his eyes to avoid seeing the thing that lay so very near, mercifully merged within the shadows beyond the gentle radiance from the single lamp. With a pang of infinite pity for the woman in his arms, he apprehended in some degree the torture this event must have inflicted on her. Frightful to him, it must in truth be vastly worse to her. There was her womanly sensitiveness to enhance the innate hideousness of the thing that had been done here before their eyes. There was, too, the fact that the murderer himself had been the man to whom she owed her life. Yes, for him, Dick realized with poignant sympathy, the happening that night was terrible indeed: for her, as he guessed now at last, the torture must be something easily to overwhelm all her strength. His touch on her grew tender beyond the ordinary tenderness of love, made gentler by a great underlying compassion for her misery.

Dick drew Mary toward the couch, there let her sink down in a huddled attitude of despair.

"I never saw a man—killed before!" she said again. There was a note of half-hysterical, almost childish complaint in her voice. She moved her head a little, as if to look into the shadows where *it* lay, then checked

herself violently, and looked up at her husband with the pathetic simplicity of terror.

"You know, Dick," she repeated dully, "I never saw a man killed before."

Before he could utter the soothing words that rose to his lips, Dick was interrupted by a slight sound at the door. Instantly, he was all alert to meet the exigencies of the situation. He stood by the couch, bending forward a little, as if in a posture of intimate fondness. Then, with a new thought, he got out his cigarette-case and lighted a cigarette, after which he resumed his former leaning over the woman as would the ardent lover. He heard the noise again presently, now so near that he made sure of being overheard, so at once he spoke with a forced cheerfulness in his inflection.

"I tell you, Mary," he declared, "everything's going to be all right for you and me. It was bully of you to come here to me like this."

The girl made no response. She lived still in the nightmare of murder—that nightmare wherein she had seen Griggs fall dead to the floor.

Dick, in nervous apprehension as to the issue, sought to bring her to realization of the new need that had come upon them.

"Talk to me," he commanded, very softly. "They'll be here in a minute. When they come in, pretend you just came here in order to meet me. Try, Mary. You must, dearest!" Then, again, his voice rose to loudness, as he continued. "Why, I've been trying all day to see you. And, now, here we are together, just as I was be-

ginning to get really discouraged. . . . . I know my father will eventually——"

He was interrupted by the swift swinging open of the hallway door. Burke stood just within the library, a revolver pointed menacingly.

"Hands up!—all of you!" The Inspector's voice fairly roared the command.

The belligerent expression of his face vanished abruptly, as his eyes fell on Dick standing by the couch and Mary reclining there in limp helplessness. His surprise would have been ludicrous but for the seriousness of the situation to all concerned. Burke's glance roved the room sharply, and he was quickly convinced that these two were in fact the only present spoil of his careful plotting. His face set grimly, for the disappointment of this minute surged fiercely within him. He started to speak, his eyes lowering as he regarded the two before him.

But Dick forestalled him. He spoke in a voice coldly repellent.

"What are you doing in this house at this time of night?" he demanded. His manner was one of stern disapproval. "I recognize you, Inspector Burke. But you must understand that there are limits even to what you can do. It seems to me, sir, that you exceed your authority by such an intrusion as this."

Burke, however, was not a whit dismayed by the rebuke and the air of rather contemptuous disdain with which it was uttered. He waved his revolver toward Mary, merely as a gesture of inquisitiveness, without any threat.

"What's she doing here?" he asked. There was wrath in his rough voice, for he could not avoid the surmise that his shrewdly concocted scheme to entrap this woman had somehow been set awry. "What's she doing here, I say?" he repeated heavily. His keen eyes were darting once more about the room, questing some clue to this disturbing mystery, so hateful to his pride.

Dick's manner became that of the devoted husband offended by impertinent obtrusion.

"You forget yourself, Inspector," he said, icily. "This is my wife. She has the right to be with me—her husband!"

The Inspector grinned sceptically. He was moved no more effectively by Mary's almost hysterical effort to respond to her husband's leading.

"Why shouldn't I be here? Why? Why? I——"

Burke broke in on the girl's pitiful histrionics ruthlessly. He was not in the least deceived. He was aware that something untoward, as he deemed it, had occurred. It seemed to him, in fact, that his finical mechanisms for the undoing of Mary Turner were in a fair way to be thwarted. But he would not give up the cause without a struggle. Again, he addressed himself to Dick, disregarding completely the aloof manner of the young man.

"Where's your father?" he questioned roughly.

"In bed, naturally," was the answer. "I ask you again: What are you doing here at this time of night?"

Burke shook his shoulders ponderously in a movement of impatience over this prolonging of the farce.

"Oh, call your father," he directed disgustedly.

Dick remonstrated with an excellent show of dignity.

"It's late," he objected. "I'd rather not disturb him, if you don't mind. Really, the idea is absurd, you know." Suddenly, he smiled very winningly, and spoke with a good assumption of ingenuousness.

"Inspector," he said briskly, "I see, I'll have to tell you the truth. It's this: I've persuaded my wife to go away with me. She's going to give all that other sort of thing up. Yes, we're going away together." There was genuine triumph in his voice now. "So, you see, we've got to talk it over. Now, then, Inspector, if you'll come back in the morning——"

The official grinned sardonically. He could not in the least guess just what had in very deed happened, but he was far too clever a man to be bamboozled by Dick's maunderings.

"Oh, that's it!" he exclaimed, with obvious incredulity.

"Of course," Dick replied bravely, though he knew that the Inspector disbelieved his pretenses. Still, for his own part, he was inclined as yet to be angry rather than alarmed by this failure to impress the officer. "You see, I didn't know——"

And even in the moment of his saying, the white beam of the flashing searchlight from the Tower fell between the undrawn draperies of the octagonal window. The light startled the Inspector again, as it had done once

before that same night. His gaze followed it instinctively. So, within the second, he saw the still form lying there on the floor—lying where had been shadows, where now, for the passing of an instant, was brilliant radiance.

There was no mistaking that awful, motionless, crumpled posture. The Inspector knew in this single instant of view that murder had been done here. Even as the beam of light from the Tower shifted and vanished from the room, he leaped to the switch by the door, and turned on the lights of the chandelier. In the next moment, he had reached the door of the passage across the room, and his whistle sounded shrill. His voice bellowed reinforcement to the blast.

"Cassidy! Cassidy!"

As Dick made a step toward his wife, from whom he had withdrawn a little in his colloquy with the official, Burke voiced his command viciously:

"Stay where you are—both of you!"

Cassidy came rushing in, with the other detectives. He was plainly surprised to find the room so nearly empty, where he had expected to behold a gang of robbers.

"Why, what's it all mean, Chief?" he questioned. His peering eyes fell on Dick, standing beside Mary, and they rounded in amazement.

"They've got Griggs!" Burke answered. There was exceeding rage in his voice, as he spoke from his kneeling posture beside the body, to which he had hurried after the summons to his aides. He glowered up into

the bewildered face of the detective. "I'll break you for this, Cassidy," he declared fiercely. "Why didn't you get here on the run when you heard the shot?"

"But there wasn't any shot," the perplexed and alarmed detective expostulated. He fairly stuttered in the earnestness of his self-defense. "I tell you, Chief, there hasn't been a sound."

Burke rose to his feet. His heavy face was set in its sternest mold.

"You could drive a hearse through the hole they've made in him," he rumbled. He wheeled on Mary and Dick. "So!" he shouted, "now it's murder! .. .. .. Well, hand it over. Where's the gun?"

Followed a moment's pause. Then the Inspector spoke harshly to Cassidy. He still felt himself somewhat dazed by this extraordinary event, but he was able to cope with the situation. He nodded toward Dick as he gave his order: "Search him!"

Before the detective could obey the direction, Dick took the revolver from his pocket where he had bestowed it, and held it out.

And it so chanced that at this incriminating crisis for the son, the father hastily strode within the library. He had been aroused by the Inspector's shouting, and was evidently greatly perturbed. His usual dignified air was marred by a patent alarm.

"What's all this?" he exclaimed, as he halted and stared doubtfully on the scene before him.

Burke, in a moment like this, was no respecter of persons, for all his judicious attentions on other occasions

to those whose influence might serve him well for benefits received.

"You can see for yourself," he said grimly to the dumfounded magnate. Then, he fixed sinister eyes on the son. "So," he went on, with somber menace in his voice, "you did it, young man." He nodded toward the detective. "Well, Cassidy, you can take 'em both down-town. . . . That's all."

The command aroused Dick to remonstrance against such indignity toward the woman whom he loved.

"Not her!" he cried, imploringly. "You don't want her, Inspector! This is all wrong!"

Now, at last, Mary interposed with a new spirit. She had regained, in some measure at least, her poise. She was speaking again with that mental clarity which was distinctive in her.

"Dick," she advised quietly, but with underlying urgency in her gently spoken words, "don't talk, please."

Burke laughed harshly.

"What do you expect?" he inquired truculently. "As a matter of fact, the thing's simple enough, young man. Either you killed Griggs, or she did."

The Inspector, with his charge, made a careless gesture toward the corpse of the murdered stool-pigeon. For the first time, Edward Gilder, as his glance unconsciously followed the officer's movement, looked and saw the ghastly inanimate heap of flesh and bone that had once been a man. He fairly reeled at the gruesome spectacle, then fumbled with an outstretched hand as he moved stumblingly until he laid hold on a chair, into

which he sank helplessly. It suddenly smote upon his consciousness that he felt very old and broken. He marveled dully over the sensation—it was wholly new to him. Then, soon, from a long way off, he heard the strident voice of the Inspector remorselessly continuing in the vile, the impossible accusation. . . . And that grotesque accusation was hurled against his only son—the boy whom he so loved. The thing was monstrous, a thing incredible. This whole seeming was no more than a chimera of the night, a phantom of bad dreams, with no truth under it. . . . Yet, the stern voice of the official came with a strange semblance of reality.

"Either you killed him," the voice repeated gratingly, "or she did. Well, then, young man, did she kill him?"

"Good God, no!" Dick shouted, aghast.

"Then, it was you!" Such was the Inspector's summary of the case.

Mary's words came frantically. Once again, she was become desperate over the course of events in this night of fearful happenings.

"No, no! He didn't!"

Burke's rasping voice reiterated the accusation with a certain complacency in the inevitability of the dilemma.

"One of you killed Griggs. Which one of you did it?" He scowled at Dick. "Did she kill him?"

Again, the husband's cry came with the fierceness of despair over the fate of the woman.

"I told you, no!"

The Inspector, always savagely impressive now in

voice and look and gesture, faced the girl with saturnine persistence.

"Well, then," he blustered, "did he kill him?"

The nod of his head was toward Dick. Then, as she remained silent: "I'm talking to you!" he snapped. "Did he kill him?"

The reply came with a soft distinctness that was like a crash of destiny.

"Yes."

Dick turned to his wife in reproachful amazement.

"Mary!" he cried, incredulously. This betrayal was something inconceivable from her, since he believed that now at last he knew her heart.

Burke, however, as usual, paid no heed to the niceties of sentiment. They had small place in his concerns as an official of police. His sole ambition just now was to fix the crime definitely on the perpetrator.

"You'll swear he killed him?" he asked, briskly, well content with this concrete result of the entanglement.

Mary subtly evaded the question, while seeming to give unqualified assent.

"Why not?" she responded listlessly.

At this intolerable assertion as he deemed it, Edward Gilder was reanimated. He sat rigidly erect in his chair. In that frightful moment, it came to him anew that here was in verity the last detail in a consummate scheme by this woman for revenge against himself.

"God!" he cried, despairingly. "And that's your vengeance!"

Mary heard, and understood. There came an inscrut-

able smile on her curving lips, but there was no satisfaction in that smile, as of one who realized the fruition of long-cherished schemes of retribution. Instead, there was only an infinite sadness, while she spoke very gently.

"I don't want vengeance—now!" she said.

"But they'll try my boy for murder," the magnate remonstrated, distraught.

"Oh, no, they can't!" came the rejoinder. And now, once again, there was a hint of the quizzical creeping in the smile. "No, they can't!" she repeated firmly, and there was profound relief in her tones since at last her ingenuity had found a way out of this outrageous situation thrust on her and on her husband.

Burke glared at the speaker in a rage that was abruptly grown suspicious in some vague way.

"What's the reason we can't?" he stormed.

Mary sprang to her feet. She was radiant with a new serenity, now that her quick-wittedness had discovered a method for baffling the mesh of evidence that had been woven about her and Dick through no fault of their own. Her eyes were glowing with even more than their usual lusters. Her voice came softly modulated, almost mocking.

"Because you couldn't convict him," she said succinctly. A contented smile bent the red graces of her lips.

Burke sneered an indignation that was, nevertheless, somewhat fearful of what might lie behind the woman's assurance.

"What's the reason?" he demanded, scornfully. "There's the body." He pointed to the rigid form of

the dead man, lying there so very near them. "And the gun was found on him. And then, you're willing to swear that he killed him. . . . Well, I guess we'll convict him, all right. Why not?"

Mary's answer was given quietly, but, none the less, with an assurance that could not be gainsaid.

"Because," she said, "my husband merely killed a burglar." In her turn, she pointed toward the body of the dead man. "That man," she continued evenly, "was the burglar. You know that! My husband shot him in defense of his home!" There was a brief silence. Then, she added, with a wonderful mildness in the music of her voice. "And so, Inspector, as you know of course, he was within the law!"

CHAPTER XX.

WHO SHOT GRIGGS?

In his office next morning, Inspector Burke was fuming over the failure of his conspiracy. He had hoped through this plot to vindicate his authority, so sadly flaunted by Garson and Mary Turner. Instead of this much-to-be-desired result from his scheming, the outcome had been nothing less than disastrous. The one certain fact was that his most valuable ally in his warfare against the criminals of the city had been done to death. Some one had murdered Griggs, the stool-pigeon. Where Burke had meant to serve a man of high influence, Edward Gilder, by railroading the bride of the magnate's son to prison, he had succeeded only in making the trouble of that merchant prince vastly worse in the ending of the affair by arresting the son for the capital crime of murder. The situation was, in very truth, intolerable. More than ever, Burke grew hot with intent to overcome the woman who had so persistently outraged his authority by her ingenious devices against the law. Anyhow, the murder of Griggs could not go unpunished. The slayer's identity must be determined, and thereafter the due penalty of the law inflicted, whoever the guilty person might prove to be. To the discovery of this identity, the Inspector was at the present

moment devoting himself by adroit questioning of Dacey and Chicago Red, who had been arrested in one of their accustomed haunts by his men a short time before.

The policeman on duty at the door was the only other person in the room, and in consequence Burke permitted himself, quite unashamed, to employ those methods of persuasion which have risen to a high degree of admiration in police circles.

"Come across now!" he admonished. His voice rolled forth like that of a bull of Bashan. He was on his feet, facing the two thieves. His head was thrust forward menacingly, and his eyes were savage. The two men shrank before him—both in natural fear, and, too, in a furtive policy of their own. This was no occasion for them to assert a personal pride against the man who had them in his toils.

"I don't know nothin'!" Chicago Red's voice was between a snarl and a whine. "Ain't I been telling you that for over an hour?"

Burke vouchsafed no answer in speech, but with a nimbleness surprising in one of his bulk, gave Dacey, who chanced to be the nearer of the two, a shove that sent the fellow staggering half-way across the room under its impetus.

With this by way of appreciable introduction to his seriousness of purpose, Burke put a question:

"Dacey, how long have you been out?"

The answer came in a sibilant whisper of dread.

"A week."

Burke pushed the implication brutally.

"Want to go back for another stretch?" The Inspector's voice was freighted with suggestions of disasters to come, which were well understood by the cringing wretch before him.

The thief shuddered, and his face, already pallid from the prison lack of sunlight like some noxious growth of a cellar, became livid. His words came in a muffled moan of fear.

"God, no!"

Burke left a little interval of silence then in which the thieves might tremble over the prospect suggested by his words, but always he maintained his steady, relentless glare on the cowed creatures. It was a familiar warfare with him. Yet, in this instance, he was destined to failure, for the men were of a type different from that of English Eddie, who was lying dead as the meet reward for treachery to his fellows. . . . When, at last, his question issued from the close-shut lips, it came like the crack of a gun.

"Who shot Griggs?"

The reply was a chorus from the two:

"I don't know—honest, I don't!"

In his eagerness, Chicago Red moved toward his questioner—unwisely.

"Honest to Gawd, I don't know nothin' about it!"

The Inspector's fist shot out toward Chicago Red's jaw. The impact was enough. The thief went to his knees under the blow.

"Now, get up—and talk!" Burke's voice came with unrepentant noisiness against the stricken man.

Cringingly, Chicago Red, who so gloried in his strength, yet was now altogether humble in this precarious case, obeyed as far as the getting to his feet was concerned. . . . It never occurred to him even that he should carry his obedience to the point of "squealing on a pal!" Had the circumstances been different, he might have refused to accept the Inspector's blow with such meekness, since above all things he loved a bit of bodily strife with some one near his own strength, and the Inspector was of a sort to offer him a battle worth while.

So, now, while he got slowly to his feet, he took care to keep at a respectful distance from the official, though his big hands fairly ached to double into fists for blows with this man who had so maltreated him.

His own self-respect, of its peculiar sort, was saved by the interference of Cassidy, who entered the Inspector's office to announce the arrival of the District Attorney.

"Send 'im in," Burke directed at once. He made a gesture toward the doorman, and added: "Take 'em back!"

A grin of evil humor writhed the lips of the police official, and he added to the attentive doorman a word of direction that might well be interpreted by the malevolent expression on his face.

"Don't be rough with 'em, Dan," he said. For once, his dominating voice was reduced to something approaching softness, in his sardonic appreciation of his own humor in the conception of what these two men,

who had ventured to resist his importunities, might receive at the hands of his faithful satellites. . . . The doorman grinned appreciatively, and herded his victims from the place. And the two went shamblingly in sure knowledge of the things that were in store. Yet, without thought of treachery. They would not "squeal"! All they would tell of the death of Eddie Griggs would be: "He got what was coming to him!"

The Inspector dropped into his swivel chair at the desk whilst he awaited the arrival of Demarest, the District Attorney. The greetings between the two were cordial when at last the public prosecutor made his appearance.

"I came as soon as I got your message," the District Attorney said, as he seated himself in a chair by the desk. "And I've sent word to Mr. Gilder. . . . Now, then, Burke, let's have this thing quickly."

The Inspector's explanation was concise:

"Joe Garson, Chicago Red, and Dacey, along with Griggs, broke into Edward Gilder's house, last night! I knew the trick was going to be pulled off, and so I planted Cassidy and a couple of other men just outside the room where the haul was to be made. Then, I went away, and after something like half an hour I came back to make the arrests myself." A look of intense disgust spread itself over the Inspector's massive face. "Well," he concluded sheepishly, "when I broke into the room I found young Gilder along with that Turner woman he married, and they were just talking together."

"No trace of the others?" Demarest questioned crisply.

At the inquiry, Burke's face crimsoned angrily, then again set in grim lines.

"I found Griggs lying on the floor—dead!" Once again the disgust showed in his expression. "The Turner woman says young Gilder shot Griggs because he broke into the house. Ain't that the limit?"

"What does the boy say?" the District Attorney demanded.

Burke shook his head dispiritedly.

"Nothing," he answered. "She told him not to talk, and so, of course, he won't, he's such a fool over her."

"And what does she say?" Demarest asked. He found himself rather amused by the exceeding chagrin of the Inspector over this affair.

Burke's voice grew savage as he snapped a reply.

"Refuses to talk till she sees a lawyer. But a touch of cheerfulness appeared in his tones as he proceeded. "We've got Chicago Red and Dacey, and we'll have Garson before the day's over. And, oh, yes, they've picked up a young girl at the Turner woman's place. And we've got one real clue—for once!" The speaker's expression was suddenly triumphant. He opened a drawer of the desk, and took out Garson's pistol, to which the silencer was still attached.

"You never saw a gun like that before, eh?" he exclaimed.

Demarest admitted the fact after a curious examination.

"I'll bet you never did!" Burke cried, with satisfaction. "That thing on the end is a Maxim silencer. There are thousands of them in use on rifles, but they've never been able to use them on revolvers before. This is a specially made gun," he went on admiringly, as he took it back and slipped it into a pocket of his coat. "That thing is absolutely noiseless. I've tried it. Well, you see, it'll be an easy thing—easiest thing in the world!—to trace that silencer attachment. Cassidy's working on that end of the thing now."

For a few minutes longer, the two men discussed the details of the crime, theorizing over the baffling event. Then, presently, Cassidy entered the office, and made report of his investigations concerning the pistol with the silencer attachment.

"I got the factory at Hartford on the wire," he explained, "and they gave me Mr. Maxim himself, the inventor of the silencer. He said this was surely a special gun, which was made for the use of Henry Sylvester, one of the professors at Yale. He wanted it for demonstration purposes. Mr. Maxim said the things have never been put on the market, and that they never will be."

"For humane reasons," Demarest commented, nodding approbation.

"Good thing, too!" Burke conceded. "They'd make murder too devilish easy, and it's easy enough now. . . . Well, Cassidy?"

"I got hold of this man, Sylvester," Cassidy went on. "I had him on the 'phone, too. He says that his house

was robbed about eight weeks ago, and among other things the silencer was stolen." Cassidy paused, and chuckled drily. "He adds the startling information that the New Haven police have not been able to recover any of the stolen property. Them rube cops are immense!"

Demarest smiled slyly, as the detective, at a nod from his superior, went toward the door.

"No," he said, maliciously; "only the New York police recover stolen goods."

"Good-night!" quoth Cassidy, turning at the door, in admission of his discomfiture over the thrust, while Burke himself grinned wryly in appreciation of the gibe.

Demarest grew grave again, as he put the question that was troubling him most.

"Is there any chance that young Gilder did shoot Griggs?"

"You can search me!" the Inspector answered, disconsolately. "My men were just outside the door of the room where Eddie Griggs was shot to death, and none of 'em heard a sound. It's that infernal silencer thing. Of course, I know that all the gang was in the house."

"But tell me just how you know that fact," Demarest objected very crisply. "Did you see them go in?"

"No, I didn't," the Inspector admitted, tartly. "Could Griggs——"

Demarest permitted himself a sneer b[illegible] his head knowledge. [illegible] o go free. I

"Griggs is dead, Burke. You're up agai[illegible]r ever killed

can't prove that Garson, or Chicago Red, or Dacey, ever entered that house."

The Inspector scowled over this positive statement.

"But Griggs said they were going to," he argued.

"I know," Demarest agreed, with an exasperating air of shrewdness; "but Griggs is dead. You see, Burke, you couldn't in a trial even repeat what he told you. It's not permissible evidence."

"Oh, the law!" the Inspector snorted, with much choler. "Well, then," he went on belligerently, "I'll charge young Gilder with murder, and call the Turner woman as a witness."

The District Attorney laughed aloud over this project.

"You can't question her on the witness-stand," he explained patronizingly to the badgered police official. "The law doesn't allow you to make a wife testify against her husband. And, what's more, you can't arrest her, and then force her to go into the witness-stand, either. No, Burke," he concluded emphatically, "your only chance of getting the murderer of Griggs is by a confession."

"Then, I'll charge them both with the murder," the Inspector growled vindictively. "And, by God, they'll both go to trial unless somebody comes through." He dinought his huge fist down on the desk with violence, "Go's voice was forbidding. "If it's my last act on murder too declared, "I'm going to get the man who shot . . . Well, ."

"I got hold as seriously disturbed by the situation "I had him o oped. He was under great personal obli-

gations to Edward Gilder, whose influence in fact had been the prime cause of his success in attaining to the important official position he now held, and he would have gone far to serve the magnate in any difficulty that might arise. He had been perfectly willing to employ all the resources of his office to relieve the son from the entanglement with a woman of unsavory notoriety. Now, thanks to the miscarried plotting of Burke to the like end, what before had been merely a vicious state of affairs was become one of the utmost dreadfulness. The worst of crimes had been committed in the house of Edward Gilder himself, and his son acknowledged himself as the murderer. The District Attorney felt a genuine sorrow in thinking of the anguish this event must have brought on the father. He had, as well, sympathy enough for the son. His acquaintance with the young man convinced him that the boy had not done the deed of bloody violence. In that fact was a mingling of comfort and of anxiety. It had been better, doubtless, if indeed Dick had shot Griggs, had inflicted a just penalty on a housebreaker. But the District Attorney was not inclined to credit the confession. Burke's account of the plot in which the stool-pigeon had been the agent offered too many complications. Altogether, the aspect of the case served to indicate that Dick could not have been the slayer. . . . Demarest shook his head dejectedly.

"Burke," he said, "I want the boy to go free. I don't believe for a minute that Dick Gilder ever killed

this pet stool-pigeon of yours. And, so, you must understand this: I want him to go free, of course."

Burke frowned refusal at this suggestion. Here was a matter in which his rights must not be invaded. He, too, would have gone far to serve a man of Edward Gilder's standing, but in this instance his professional pride was in revolt. He had been defied, trapped, made a victim of the gang who had killed his most valued informer.

"The youngster'll go free when he tells what he knows," he said angrily, "and not a minute before." His expression lightened a little. "Perhaps the old gentleman can make him talk. I can't. He's under that woman's thumb, of course, and she's told him he mustn't say a word. So, he don't." A grin of half-embarrassed appreciation moved the heavy jaws as he glanced at the District Attorney. "You see," he explained, "I can't make him talk, but I might if circumstances were different. On account of his being the old man's son, I'm a little cramped in my style."

It was, in truth, one thing to browbeat and assault a convict like Dacey or Chicago Red, but quite another to employ the like violence against a youth of Dick Gilder's position in the world. Demarest understood perfectly, but he was inclined to be sceptical over the Inspector's theory that Dick possessed actual cognizance as to the killing of Griggs.

"You think that young Gilder really knows?" he questioned, doubtfully.

"I don't think anything—yet!" Burke retorted. "All

I know is this: Eddie Griggs, the most valuable crook that ever worked for me, has been murdered." The official's voice was charged with threatening as he went on. "And some one, man or woman, is going to pay for it!"

"Woman?" Demarest repeated, in some astonishment.

Burke's voice came merciless.

"I mean, Mary Turner," he said slowly.

Demarest was shocked.

"But, Burke," he expostulated, "she's not that sort."

The Inspector sneered openly.

"How do you know she ain't?" he demanded. "Well, anyhow, she's made a monkey out of the Police Department, and, first, last, and all the time, I'm a copper. . . And that reminds me," he went on with a resumption of his usual curt bluntness, "I want you to wait for Mr. Gilder outside, while I get busy with the girl they've brought down from Mary Turner's flat."

CHAPTER XXI.

AGGIE AT BAY.

Burke, after the lawyer had left him, watched the door expectantly for the coming of the girl, whom he had ordered brought before him. But, when at last Dan appeared, and stood aside to permit her passing into the office, the Inspector gasped at the unexpectedness of the vision. He had anticipated the coming of a woman of that world with which he was most familiar in the exercise of his professional duties—the underworld of criminals, some one beautiful perhaps, but with the brand of viciousness marked subtly, yet visibly for the trained eye to see. Then, even in that first moment, he told himself that he should have been prepared for the unusual in this instance, since the girl had to do with Mary Turner, and that disturbing person herself showed in face and form and manner nothing to suggest aught but a gentlewoman. And, in the next instant, the Inspector forgot his surprise in a sincere, almost ardent admiration.

The girl was rather short, but of a slender elegance of form that was ravishing. She was gowned, too, with a *chic* nicety to arouse the envy of all less-fortunate women. Her costume had about it an indubitable air, a finality of perfection in its kind. On another, it

might have appeared perhaps the merest trifle garish. But that fault, if in fact it ever existed, was made into a virtue by the correcting innocence of the girl's face. It was a childish face, childish in the exquisite smoothness of the soft, pink skin, childish in the wondering stare of the blue eyes, now so widely opened in dismay, childish in the wistful drooping of the rosebud mouth.

The girl advanced slowly, with a laggard hesitation in her movements obviously from fear. She approached the desk, from behind which the Inspector watched, fascinated by the fresh and wholesome beauty of this young creature. He failed to observe the underlying anger beneath the girl's outward display of alarm. He shook off his first impression by means of a resort to his customary bluster in such cases.

"Now, then, my girl," he said roughly, "I want to know——"

There came a change, wrought in the twinkling of an eye. The tiny, trimly shod foot of the girl rose and fell in a wrathful stamp.

"How dare you!" The clear blue eyes were become darkened with anger. There was a deepened leaf of red in either cheek. The drooping lips drooped no longer, but were bent to a haughtiness that was finely impressive.

Before the offended indignation of the young woman, Burke sat bewildered by embarrassment for once in his life, and quite at a loss.

"What's that?" he said, dubiously.

The girl explained the matter explicitly enough.

"What do you mean by this outrage?" she stormed. Her voice was low and rich, with a charming roundness that seemed the very hallmark of gentility. But, now, it was surcharged with an indignant amazement over the indignity put upon her by the representatives of the law. Then, abruptly, the blue eyes were softened in their fires, as by the sudden nearness of tears.

"What do you mean?" the girl repeated. Her slim form was tense with wrath. "I demand my instant release." There was indescribable rebuke in her slow emphasis of the words.

Burke was impressed in spite of himself, in spite of his accustomed cold indifference to the feelings of others as necessity compelled him to make investigation of them. His harsh, blustering voice softened perceptibly, and he spoke in a wheedling tone, such as one might employ in the effort to tranquillize a spoiled child in a fit of temper.

"Wait a minute," he remonstrated. "Wait a minute!" He made a pacifically courteous gesture toward one of the chairs, which stood by an end of the desk. "Sit down," he invited, with an effort toward cajoling.

The scorn of the girl was superb. Her voice came icily, as she answered:

"I shall do nothing of the sort. Sit down, indeed!—here! Why, I have been arrested——" There came a break in the music of her tones throbbing resentment. A little sob crept in, and broke the sequence of words. The dainty face was vivid with shame. "I—" she faltered, "I've been arrested—by a common policeman!"

The Inspector seized on the one flaw left him for defense against her indictment.

"No, no, miss," he argued, earnestly. "Excuse me. It wasn't any common policeman—it was a detective sergeant."

But his effort to placate was quite in vain. The ingenuous little beauty with the child's face and the blue eyes so widely opened fairly panted in her revolt against the ignominy of her position, and was not to be so easily appeased. Her voice came vibrant with disdain. Her level gaze on the Inspector was of a sort to suggest to him anxieties over possible complications here.

"You wait!" she cried violently. "You just wait, I tell you, until my papa hears of this!"

Burke regarded the furious girl doubtfully.

"Who is your papa?" he asked, with a bit of alarm stirring in his breast, for he had no mind to offend any one of importance where there was no need.

"I sha'n't tell you," came the petulant retort from the girl. Her ivory forehead was wrinkled charmingly in a little frown of obstinacy. "Why," she went on, displaying new symptoms of distress over another appalling idea that flashed on her in this moment, "you would probably give my name to the reporters." Once again the rosebud mouth drooped into curves of sorrow, of a great self-pity. "If it ever got into the newspapers, my family would die of shame!"

The pathos of her fear pierced through the hardened crust of the police official. He spoke apologetically.

"Now, the easiest way out for both of us," he sug-

gested, "is for you to tell me just who you are. You see, young lady, you were found in the house of a notorious crook."

The haughtiness of the girl waxed. It seemed as if she grew an inch taller in her scorn of the Inspector's saying.

"How perfectly absurd!" she exclaimed, scathingly. "I was calling on Miss Mary Turner!"

"How did you come to meet her, anyhow?" Burke inquired. He still held his big voice to a softer modulation than that to which it was habituated.

Yet, the disdain of the girl seemed only to increase momently. She showed plainly that she regarded this brass-buttoned official as one unbearably insolent in his demeanor toward her. Nevertheless, she condescended to reply, with an exaggeration of the aristocratic drawl to indicate her displeasure.

"I was introduced to Miss Turner," she explained, "by Mr. Richard Gilder. Perhaps you have heard of his father, the owner of the Emporium."

"Oh, yes, I've heard of his father, and of him, too," Burke admitted, placatingly.

But the girl relaxed not a whit in her attitude of offense.

"Then," she went on severely, "you must see at once that you are entirely mistaken in this matter." Her blue eyes widened further as she stared accusingly at the Inspector, who betrayed evidences of perplexity, and hesitated for an answer. Then, the doll-like, charming

face took on a softer look, which had in it a suggestion of appeal.

"Don't you see it?" she demanded.

"Well, no," Burke rejoined uneasily; "not exactly, I don't!" In the presence of this delicate and graceful femininity, he experienced a sudden, novel distaste for his usual sledge-hammer methods of attack in interrogation. Yet, his duty required that he should continue his questioning. He found himself in fact between the devil and the deep sea—though this particular devil appeared rather as an angel of light.

Now, at his somewhat feeble remark in reply to her query, the childish face grew as hard as its curving contours would permit.

"Sir!" she cried indignantly. Her little head was thrown back in scornful reproof, and she turned a shoulder toward the official contemptuously.

"Now, now!" Burke exclaimed in remonstrance. After all, he could not be brutal with this guileless maiden. He must, however, make the situation clear to her, lest she think him a beast—which would never do!

"You see, young lady," he went on with a gentleness of voice and manner that would have been inconceivable to Dacey and Chicago Red; "you see, the fact is that, even if you were introduced to this Mary Turner by young Mr. Gilder, this same Mary Turner herself is an ex-convict, and she's just been arrested for murder."

At the dread word, a startling change was wrought in the girl. She wheeled to face the Inspector, her slender body swaying a little toward him. The rather heavy

brows were lifted slightly in a disbelieving stare. The red lips were parted, rounded to a tremulous horror.

"Murder!" she gasped; and then was silent.

"Yes," Burke went on, wholly at ease now, since he had broken the ice thus effectually. "You see, if there's a mistake about you, you don't want it to go any further —not a mite further, that's sure. So, you see, now, that's one of the reasons why I must know just who you are." Then, in his turn, Burke put the query that the girl had put to him a little while before. "You see that, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" was the instant agreement. "You should have told me all about this horrid thing in the first place." Now, the girl's manner was transformed. She smiled wistfully on the Inspector, and the glance of the blue eyes was very kind, subtly alluring. Yet in this unbending, there appeared even more decisively than hitherto the fine qualities in bearing of one delicately nurtured. She sank down in a chair by the desk, and forthwith spoke with a simplicity that in itself was somehow peculiarly potent in its effect on the official who gave attentive ear.

"My name is Helen Travers West," she announced.

Burke started a little in his seat, and regarded the speaker with a new deference as he heard that name uttered.

"Not the daughter of the railway president?" he inquired.

"Yes," the girl admitted. Then, anew, she displayed

a serious agitation over the thought of any possible publicity in this affair.

"Oh, please, don't tell any one," she begged prettily. The blue eyes were very imploring, beguiling, too. The timid smile that wreathed the tiny mouth was marvelously winning. The neatly gloved little hands were held outstretched, clasped in supplication. "Surely, sir, you see now quite plainly why it must never be known by any one in all the wide, wide world that I have ever been brought to this perfectly dreadful place—though you have been quite nice!" Her voice dropped to a note of musical prayerfulness. The words were spoken very softly and very slowly, with intonations difficult for a man to deny. "Please let me go home." She plucked a minute handkerchief from her handbag, put it to her eyes, and began to sob quietly.

The burly Inspector of Police was moved to quick sympathy. Really, when all was said and done, it was a shame that one like her should by some freak of fate have become involved in the sordid, vicious things that his profession made it obligatory on him to investigate. There was a considerable hint of the paternal in his air as he made an attempt to offer consolation to the afflicted damsel.

"That's all right, little lady," he exclaimed cheerfully. "Now, don't you be worried—not a little bit. Take it from me, Miss West. . . . Just go ahead, and tell me all you know about this Turner woman. Did you see her yesterday?"

The girl's sobs ceased. After a final dab with the mi-

nute handkerchief, she leaned forward a little toward the Inspector, and proceeded to put a question to him with great eagerness.

"Will you let me go home as soon as I've told you the teenty little I know?"

"Yes," Burke agreed promptly, with an encouraging smile. And for a good measure of reassurance, he added as one might to an alarmed child: "No one is going to hurt you, young lady."

"Well, then, you see, it was this way," began the brisk explanation. "Mr. Gilder was calling on me one afternoon, and he said to me then that he knew a very charming young woman, who——"

Here the speech ended abruptly, and once again the handkerchief was brought into play as the sobbing broke forth with increased violence. Presently, the girl's voice rose in a wail.

"Oh, this is dreadful—dreadful!" In the final word, the wail broke to a moan.

Burke felt himself vaguely guilty as the cause of such suffering on the part of one so young, so fair, so innocent. As a culprit, he sought his best to afford a measure of soothing for this grief that had had its source in his performance of duty.

"That's all right, little lady," he urged in a voice as nearly mellifluous as he could contrive with its mighty volume. "That's all right. I have to keep on telling you. Nobody's going to hurt you—not a little bit. Believe me! Why, nobody ever would want to hurt you!"

But his well-meant attempt to assuage the stricken

creature's wo was futile. The sobbing continued. With it came a plaintive cry, many times repeated, softly, but very miserably.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

"Isn't there something else you can tell me about this woman?" Burke inquired in desperation before the plaintive outburst. He hoped to distract her from such grief over her predicament.

The girl gave no least heed to the question.

"Oh, I'm so frightened!" she gasped.

"Tut, tut!" the Inspector chided. "Now, I tell you there's nothing at all for you to be afraid of."

"I'm afraid!" the girl asserted dismally. "I'm afraid you will—put me—in a cell!" Her voice sank to a murmur hardly audible as she spoke the words so fraught with dread import to one of her refined sensibilities.

"Pooh!" Burke returned, gallantly. "Why, my dear young lady, nobody in the world could think of you and a cell at the same time—no, indeed!"

Instantly, the girl responded to this bald flattery. She fairly radiated appreciation of the compliment, as she turned her eyes, dewy with tears, on the somewhat flustered Inspector.

"Oh, thank you!" she exclaimed, with naïve enjoyment.

Forthwith, Burke set out to make the most of this favorable opportunity.

"Are you sure you've told me all you know about this woman?" he questioned.

"Oh, yes! I've only seen her two or three times," came the ready response. The voice changed to supplication, and again the clasped hands were extended beseechingly.

"Oh, please, Commissioner! Won't you let me go home?"

The use of a title higher than his own flattered the Inspector, and he was moved to graciousness. Besides, it was obvious that his police net in this instance had enmeshed only the most harmless of doves. He smiled encouragingly.

"Well, now, little lady," he said, almost tenderly, "if I let you go now, will you promise to let me know if you are able to think of anything else about this Turner woman?"

"I will—indeed, I will!" came the fervent assurance. There was something almost—quite provocative in the flash of gratitude that shone forth from the blue eyes of the girl in that moment of her superlative relief. It moved Burke to a desire for rehabilitation in her estimation.

"Now, you see," he went on in his heavy voice, yet very kindly, and with a sort of massive playfulness in his manner," no one has hurt you—not even a little bit, after all. Now, you run right home to your mother."

The girl did not need to be told twice. On the instant, she sprang up joyously, and started toward the door, with a final ravishing smile for the pleased official at the desk.

"I'll go just as fast as ever I can," the musical voice made assurance blithely.

"Give my compliments to your father," Burke requested courteously. "And tell him I'm sorry I frightened you."

The girl turned at the door. . . . After all, too great haste might be indiscreet.

"I will, Commissioner," she promised, with an arch smile. "And I know papa will be so grateful to you for all your kindness to me!"

It was at this critical moment that Cassidy entered from the opposite side of the office. As his eyes fell on the girl at the door across from him, his stolid face lighted in a grin. And, in that same instant of recognition between the two, the color went out of the girl's face. The little red lips snapped together in a line of supreme disgust against this vicissitude of fate after all her manœuverings in the face of the enemy. She stood motionless in wordless dismay, impotent before this disaster forced on her by untoward chance.

"Hello, Aggie!" the detective remarked, with a smirk, while the Inspector stared from one to the other with rounded eyes of wonder, and his jaw dropped from the stark surprise of this new development.

The girl returned deliberately to the chair she had occupied through the interview with the Inspector, and dropped into it weakly. Her form rested there limply now, and the blue eyes stared disconsolately at the blank wall before her. She realized that fate had decreed defeat for her in the game. It was after a minute

of silence in which the two men sat staring that at last she spoke with a savage wrath against the pit into which she had fallen after her arduous efforts.

"Ain't that the damnedest luck!"

For a little interval still, Burke turned his glances from the girl to Cassidy, and then back again to the girl, who sat immobile with her blue eyes steadfastly fixed on the wall. The police official was, in truth, totally bewildered. Here was inexplicable mystery. Finally, he addressed the detective curtly.

"Cassidy, do you know this woman?"

"Sure, I do!" came the placid answer. He went on to explain with the direct brevity of his kind. "She's little Aggie Lynch—con' woman, from Buffalo—two years for blackmail—did her time at Burnsing."

With this succinct narrative concerning the girl who sat mute and motionless in the chair with her eyes fast on the wall, Cassidy relapsed into silence, during which he stared rather perplexedly at his chief, who seemed to be in the throes of unusual emotion. As the detective expressed it in his own vernacular: For the first time in his experience, the Inspector appeared to be actually "rattled."

For a little time, there was silence, the while Burke sat staring at the averted face of the girl. His expression was that of one who has just undergone a soul-stirring shock. Then, presently, he set his features grimly, rose from his chair, and walked to a position directly in the front of the girl, who still refused to look in his direction.

"Young woman——" he began, severely. Then, of a sudden he laughed. "You picked the right business, all right, all right!" he said, with a certain enthusiasm. He laughed aloud until his eyes were only slits, and his ample paunch trembled vehemently.

"Well," he went on, at last, "I certainly have to hand it to you, kid. You're a beaut'!"

Aggie sniffed vehemently in rebuke of the gross partiality of fate in his behalf.

"Just as I had him goin'!" she said bitterly, as if in self-communion, without shifting her gaze from the blank surface of the wall.

Now, however, Burke was reminded once again of his official duties, and he turned quickly to the attentive Cassidy.

"Have you got a picture of this young woman?" he asked brusquely. And when Cassidy had replied in the negative, he again faced the adventuress with a mocking grin—in which mockery, too, was a fair fragment for himself, who had been so thoroughly within her toils of blandishment.

"I'd dearly love to have a photograph of you, Miss Helen Travers West," he said.

The speech aroused the stolid detective to a new interest.

"Helen Travers West?" he repeated, inquiringly.

"Oh, that's the name she told me," the Inspector explained, somewhat shamefacedly before this question from his inferior. Then he chuckled, for he had sense of humor sufficient to triumph even over his own discom-

fiture in this encounter. "And she had me winging, too!" he confessed. "Yes, I admit it." He turned to the girl admiringly. "You sure are immense, little one —immense!" He smiled somewhat more in his official manner of mastery. "And now, may I have the honor of asking you to accept the escort of Mr. Cassidy to our gallery."

Aggie sprang to her feet and regarded the Inspector with eyes in which was now no innocence, such as had beguiled him so recently from those ingenuous orbs.

"Oh, can that stuff!" she cried, crossly. "Let's get down to business on the dot—and no frills on it! Keep to cases!"

"Now you're talking," Burke declared, with a new appreciation of the versatility of this woman—who had not been wasting her time hitherto, and had no wish to lose it now.

"You can't do anything to us," Aggie declared, strongly. There remained no trace of the shrinking violet that had been Miss Helen Travers West. Now, she revealed merely the business woman engaged in a fight against the law, which was opposed definitely to her peculiar form of business.

"You can't do anything to me, and you know you can't!" she went on, with an almost convincing tranquillity of assertion. "Why, I'll be sprung inside an hour." There came a ripple of laughter that reminded the Inspector of the fashion in which he had been overcome by this woman's wiles. And she spoke with a

certitude of conviction that was rather terrifying to one who had just fallen under the stress of her spells.

"Why, *habeas corpus* is my lawyer's middle name!"

"On the level, now," the Inspector demanded, quite unmoved by the final declarations, "when did you see Mary Turner last?"

Aggie resorted anew to her practises of deception. Her voice held the accents of unimpeachable truth, and her eyes looked unflinchingly into those of her questioner as she answered.

"Early this morning," she declared. "We slept together last night, because I had the willies. She blew the joint about half-past ten."

Burke shook his head, more in sorrow than in anger.

"What's the use of your lying to me?" he remonstrated.

"What, me?" Aggie clamored, with every evidence of being deeply wounded by the charge against her veracity. "Oh, I wouldn't do anything like that—on the level! What would be the use? I couldn't fool you, Commissioner."

Burke stroked his chin sheepishly, under the influence of memories of Miss Helen Travers West.

"So help me," Aggie continued with the utmost solemnity, "Mary never left the house all night. I'd swear that's the truth on a pile of Bibles a mile high!"

"Have to be higher than that," the Inspector commented, grimly. "You see, Aggie Lynch, Mary Turner was arrested just after midnight." His voice deepened

and came blustering. "Young woman, you'd better tell all you know."

"I don't know a thing!" Aggie retorted, sharply. She faced the Inspector fiercely, quite unabashed by the fact that her vigorous offer to commit perjury had been of no avail.

Burke, with a quick movement, drew the pistol from his pocket and extended it toward the girl.

"How long has she owned this gun?" he said, threateningly.

Aggie showed no trace of emotion as her glance ran over the weapon.

"She didn't own it," was her firm answer.

"Oh, then it's Garson's!" Burke exclaimed.

"I don't know whose it is," Aggie replied, with an air of boredom well calculated to deceive. "I never laid eyes on it till now."

The Inspector's tone abruptly took on a somber coloring, with an underlying menace.

"English Eddie was killed with this gun last night," he said. "Now, who did it?" His broad face was sinister. "Come on, now! Who did it?"

Aggie became flippant, seemingly unimpressed by the Inspector's savageness.

"How should I know?" she drawled. "What do you think I am—a fortune-teller?"

"You'd better come through," Burke reiterated. Then his manner changed to wheedling. "If you're the wise kid I think you are, you will."

Aggie waxed very petulant over this insistence.

"I tell you, I don't know anything! Say, what are you trying to hand me, anyway?"

Burke scowled on the girl portentously, and shook his head.

"Now, it won't do, I tell you, Aggie Lynch. I'm wise. You listen to me." Once more his manner turned to the cajoling. "You tell me what you know, and I'll see you make a clean get-away, and I'll slip you a nice little piece of money, too."

The girl's face changed with startling swiftness. She regarded the Inspector shrewdly, a crafty glint in her eyes.

"Let me get this straight," she said. "If I tell you what I know about Mary Turner and Joe Garson, I get away?"

"Clean!" Burke ejaculated, eagerly.

"And you'll slip me some coin, too?"

"That's it!" came the hasty assurance. "Now, what do you say?"

The small figure grew tense. The delicate, childish face was suddenly distorted with rage, a rage black and venomous. The blue eyes were blazing. The voice came thin and piercing.

"I say, you're a great big stiff! What do you think I am?" she stormed at the discomfited Inspector, while Cassidy looked on in some enjoyment at beholding his superior being worsted. Aggie wheeled on the detective. "Say, take me out of here," she cried in a voice surcharged with disgust. "I'd rather be in the cooler than here with him!"

Now Burke's tone was dangerous.

"You'll tell," he growled, "or you'll go up the river for a stretch."

"I don't know anything," the girl retorted, spiritedly. And, if I did, I wouldn't tell—not in a million years!" She thrust her head forward challengingly as she faced the Inspector, and her expression was resolute. "Now, then," she ended, "send me up—if you can!"

"Take her away," Burke snapped to the detective.

Aggie went toward Cassidy without any sign of reluctance.

"Yes, do, please!" she exclaimed with a sneer. "And do it in a hurry. Being in the room with him makes me sick!" She turned to stare at the Inspector with eyes that were very clear and very hard. In this moment, there was nothing childish in their gaze.

"Thought I'd squeal, did you?" she said, evenly. "Yes, I will"—the red lips bent to a smile of supreme scorn—"like hell!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TRAP THAT FAILED.

Burke, despite his quality of heaviness, was blest with a keen sense of humor, against which at times his professional labors strove mutinously. In the present instance, he had failed utterly to obtain any information of value from the girl whom he had just been examining. On the contrary, he had been befooled outrageously by a female criminal, in a manner to wound deeply his professional pride. Nevertheless, he bore no grudge against the adventuress. His sense of the absurd served him well, and he took a lively enjoyment in recalling the method by which her plausible wiles had beguiled him. He gave her a real respect for the adroitness with which she had deceived him—and he was not one to be readily deceived. So, now, as the scornful maiden went out of the door under the escort of Cassidy, Burke bowed gallantly to her lithe back, and blew a kiss from his thick fingertips, in mocking reverence for her as an artist in her way. Then, he seated himself, pressed the desk call-button, and, when he had learned that Edward Gilder was arrived, ordered that the magnate and the District Attorney be admitted, and that the son, also, be sent up from his cell.

"It's a bad business, sir," Burke said, with hearty

sympathy, to the shaken father, after the formal greetings that followed the entrance of the two men. "It's a very bad business."

"What does he say?" Gilder questioned. There was something pitiful in the distress of this man, usually so strong and so certain of his course. Now, he was hesitant in his movements, and his mellow voice came more weakly than its wont. There was a pathetic pleading in the dulled eyes with which he regarded the Inspector.

"Nothing!" Burke answered. "That's why I sent for you. I suppose Mr. Demarest has made the situation plain to you."

Gilder nodded, his face miserable.

"Yes," he has explained it to me," he said in a lifeless voice. "It's a terrible position for my boy. But you'll release him at once, won't you?" Though he strove to put confidence into his words, his painful doubt was manifest.

"I can't," Burke replied, reluctantly, but bluntly. "You ought not to expect it, Mr. Gilder."

"But," came the protest, delivered with much more spirit, "you know very well that he didn't do it!"

Burke shook his head emphatically in denial of the allegation.

"I don't know anything about it—yet," he contradicted.

The face of the magnate went white with fear.

"Inspector," he cried brokenly, "you—don't mean—"

Burke answered with entire candor.

"I mean, Mr. Gilder, that you've got to make him

talk. That's what I want you to do, for all our sakes. Will you?"

"I'll do my best," the unhappy man replied, forlornly.

A minute later, Dick, in charge of an officer, was brought into the room. He was pale, a little disheveled from his hours in a cell. He still wore his evening clothes of the night before. His face showed clearly the deepened lines, graven by the suffering to which he had been subjected, but there was no weakness in his expression. Instead, a new force that love and sorrow had brought out in his character was plainly visible. The strength of his nature was springing to full life under the stimulus of the ordeal through which he was passing.

The father went forward quickly, and caught Dick's hands in a mighty grip.

"My boy!" he murmured, huskily. Then, he made a great effort, and controlled his emotion to some extent. "The Inspector tells me," he went on, "that you've refused to talk—to answer his questions."

Dick, too, winced under the pain of this meeting with his father in a situation so sinister. But he was, to some degree, apathetic from over-much misery. Now, in reply to his father's words, he only nodded a quiet assent.

"That wasn't wise under the circumstances," the father remonstrated hurriedly. "However, now, Demarest and I are here to protect your interests, so that you can talk freely." He went on with a little catch of anxiety in his voice. "Now, Dick, tell us! Who killed that man? We must know. Tell me."

Burke broke in impatiently, with his blustering fashion of address.

"Where did you get——?"

But Demarest raised a restraining hand.

"Wait, please!" he admonished the Inspector. "You wait a bit." He went a step toward the young man. "Give the boy a chance," he said, and his voice was very friendly as he went on speaking. "Dick, I don't want to frighten you, but your position is really a dangerous one. Your only chance is to speak with perfect frankness. I pledge you my word, I'm telling the truth, Dick." There was profound concern in the lawyer's thin face, and his voice, trained to oratorical arts, was emotionally persuasive. "Dick, my boy, I want you to forget that I'm the District Attorney, and remember only that I'm an old friend of yours, and of your father's, who is trying very hard to help you. Surely, you can trust me. Now, Dick, tell me: Who shot Griggs?"

There came a long pause. Burke's face was avid with desire for knowledge, with the keen expectancy of the hunter on the trail, which was characteristic of him in his professional work. The District Attorney himself was less vitally eager, but his curiosity, as well as his wish to escape from an embarrassing situation, showed openly on his alert countenance. The heavy features of the father were twisting a little in nervous spasms, for to him this hour was all anguish, since his only son was in such horrible plight. Dick alone seemed almost tranquil, though the outward calm was belied by the flickering of his eyelids and the occasional involuntary

movement of the lips. Finally he spoke, in a cold, weary voice.

"I shot Griggs," he said.

Demarest realized subtly that his plea had failed, but he made ar effort to resist the impression, to take the admission at its face value.

"Why?" he demanded.

Dick's answer came in the like unmeaning tones, and as wearily.

"Because I thought he was a burglar."

The District Attorney was beginning to feel his professional pride aroused against this young man who so flagrantly repelled his attempts to learn the truth concerning the crime that had been committed. He resorted to familiar artifices for entangling one questioned.

"Oh, I see!" he said, in a tone of conviction. "Now, let's go back a little. Burke says you told him last night that you had persuaded your wife to come over to the house, and join you there. Is that right?"

"Yes." The monosyllable was uttered indifferently.

"And, while the two of you were talking," Demarest continued in a matter-of-fact manner. He did not conclude the sentence, but asked instead: "Now, tell me, Dick, just what did happen, won't you?"

There was no reply; and, after a little interval, the lawyer resumed his questioning.

"Did this burglar come into the room?"

Dick nodded an assent.

"And he attacked you?"

There came another nod of affirmation.

"And there was a struggle?"

"Yes," Dick said, and now there was resolution in his answer.

"And you shot him?" Demarest asked, smoothly.

"Yes," the young man said again.

"Then," the lawyer countered on the instant, "where did you get the revolver?"

Dick started to answer without thought:

"Why, I grabbed it——" Then, the significance of this crashed on his consciousness, and he checked the words trembling on his lips. His eyes, which had been downcast, lifted and glared on the questioner. "So," he said with swift hostility in his voice, "so, you're trying to trap me, too!" He shrugged his shoulders in a way he had learned abroad. "You! And you talk of friendship. I want none of such friendship."

Demarest, greatly disconcerted, was skilled, nevertheless, in dissembling, and he hid his chagrin perfectly. There was only reproach in his voice as he answered stoutly:

"I am your friend, Dick."

But Burke would be no longer restrained. He had listened with increasing impatience to the diplomatic efforts of the District Attorney, which had ended in total rout. Now, he insisted on employing his own more drastic, and, as he believed, more efficacious, methods. He stood up, and spoke in his most threatening manner.

"You don't want to take us for fools, young man," he said, and his big tones rumbled harshly through the

room. "If you shot Griggs in mistake for a burglar, why did you try to hide the fact? Why did you pretend to me that you and your wife were alone in the room—when you had *that* there with you, eh? Why didn't you call for help? Why didn't you call for the police, as any honest man would naturally under such circumstances?"

The arraignment was severely logical. Dick showed his appreciation of the justice of it in the whitening of his face, nor did he try to answer the charges thus hurled at him.

The father, too, appreciated the gravity of the situation. His face was working, as if toward tears.

"We're trying to save you," he pleaded, tremulously.

Burke persisted in his vehement system of attack. Now, he again brought out the weapon that had done Eddie Griggs to death.

"Where'd you get this gun?" he shouted.

Dick held his tranquil pose.

"I won't talk any more," he answered, simply. "I must see my wife first." His voice became more aggressive. "I want to know what you've done to her."

Burke seized on this opening.

"Did she kill Griggs?' he questioned, roughly.

For once, Dick was startled out of his calm.

"No, no!" he cried, desperately.

Burke followed up his advantage.

"Then, who did?" he demanded, sharply. "Who did?"

Now, however, the young man had regained his self-

control. He answered very quietly, but with an air of finality.

"I won't say any more until I've talked with a lawyer whom I can trust." He shot a vindictive glance toward Demarest.

The father intervened with a piteous eagerness.

"Dick, if you know who killed this man, you must speak to protect yourself."

Burke's voice came viciously.

"The gun was found on you. Don't forget that."

"You don't seem to realize the position you're in," the father insisted, despairingly. "Think of me, Dick, my boy. If you won't speak for your own sake, do it for mine."

The face of the young man softened as he met his father's beseeching eyes.

"I'm sorry, Dad," he said, very gently. "But I—well, I can't!"

Again, Burke interposed. His busy brain was working out a new scheme for solving this irritating problem.

"I'm going to give him a little more time to think things over," he said, curtly. He went back to his chair. "Perhaps he'll get to understand the importance of what we've been saying pretty soon." He scowled at Dick. "Now, young man," he went on briskly, "you want to do a lot of quick thinking, and a lot of honest thinking, and, when you're ready to tell the truth, let me know."

He pressed the button on his desk, and, as the doorman appeared, addressed that functionary.

"Dan, have one of the men take him back. You wait outside."

Dick, however, did not move. His voice came with a note of determination.

"I want to know about my wife. Where is she?"

Burke disregarded the question as completely as if it had not been uttered, and went on speaking to the doorman with a suggestion in his words that was effective.

"He's not to speak to any one, you understand." Then he condescended to give his attention to the prisoner. "You'll know all about your wife, young man, when you make up your mind to tell me the truth."

Dick gave no heed to the Inspector's statement. His eyes were fixed on his father, and there was a great tenderness in their depths. And he spoke very softly:

"Dad, I'm sorry!"

The father's gaze met the son's, and the eyes of the two locked. There was no other word spoken. Dick turned, and followed his custodian out of the office in silence. Even after the shutting of the door behind the prisoner, the pause endured for some moments.

Then, at last, Burke spoke to the magnate.

"You see, Mr. Gilder, what we're up against. I can't let him go—yet!"

The father strode across the room in a sudden access of rage.

"He's thinking of that woman," he cried out, in a loud voice. "He's trying to shield her."

"He's a loyal kid, at that," Burke commented, with a grudging admiration. "I'll say that much for him."

His expression grew morose, as again he pressed the button on his desk. "And now," he vouchsafed, "I'll show you the difference." Then, as the doorman reappeared, he gave his order: "Dan, have the Turner woman brought up." He regarded the two men with his bristling brows pulled down in a scowl. "I'll have to try a different game with her," he said, thoughtfully. "She sure is one clever little dame. But, if she didn't do it herself, she knows who did, all right." Again, Burke's voice took on its savage note. "And some one's got to pay for killing Griggs. I don't have to explain why to Mr. Demarest, but to you, Mr. Gilder. You see, it's this way: The very foundations of the work done by this department rest on the use of crooks, who are willing to betray their pals for coin. I told you a bit about it last night. Now, you understand, if Griggs's murder goes unpunished, it'll put the fear of God into the heart of every stool-pigeon we employ. And then where'd we be? Tell me that!"

The Inspector next called his stenographer, and gave explicit directions. At the back of the room, behind the desk, were three large windows, which opened on a corridor, and across this was a tier of cells. The stenographer was to take his seat in this corridor, just outside one of the windows. Over the windows, the shades were drawn, so that he would remain invisible to any one within the office, while yet easily able to overhear every word spoken in the room.

When he had completed his instructions to the stenographer, Burke turned to Gilder and Demarest.

"Now, this time," he said energetically, "I'll be the one to do the talking. And get this: Whatever you hear me say, don't you be surprised. Remember, we're dealing with crooks, and, when you're dealing with crooks, you have to use crooked ways."

There was a brief period of silence. Then, the door opened, and Mary Turner entered the office. She walked slowly forward, moving with the smooth strength and grace that were the proof of perfect health and of perfect poise, the correlation of mind and body in exactness. Her form, clearly revealed by the clinging evening dress, was a curving group of graces. The beauty of her face was enhanced, rather than lessened, by the pallor of it, for the fading of the richer colors gave to the fine features an expression more spiritual, made plainer the underlying qualities that her accustomed brilliance might half-conceal. She paid absolutely no attention to the other two in the room, but went straight to the desk, and there halted, gazing with her softly penetrant eyes of deepest violet into the face of the Inspector.

Under that intent scrutiny, Burke felt a challenge, set himself to match craft with craft. He was not likely to undervalue the wits of one who had so often flouted him, who, even now, had placed him in a preposterous predicament by this entanglement over the death of a spy. But he was resolved to use his best skill to disarm her sophistication. His large voice was modulated to kindliness as he spoke in a casual manner.

"I just sent for you to tell you that you're free."

Mary regarded the speaker with an impenetrable expression. Her tones as she spoke were quite as matter-of-fact as his own had been. In them was no wonder, no exultation.

"Then, I can go," she said, simply.

"Sure, you can go," Burke replied, amiably.

Without any delay, yet without any haste, Mary glanced toward Gilder and Demarest, who were watching the scene closely. Her eyes were somehow appraising, but altogether indifferent. Then, she went toward the outer door of the office, still with that almost lackadaisical air.

Burke waited rather impatiently until she had nearly reached the door before he shot his bolt, with a fine assumption of carelessness in the announcement.

"Garson has confessed!"

Mary, who readily enough had already guessed the essential hypocrisy of all this play, turned and confronted the Inspector, and answered without the least trace of fear, but with the firmness of knowledge:

"Oh, no, he hasn't!"

Her attitude exasperated Burke. His voice roared out wrathfully.

"What's the reason he hasn't?"

The music in the tones of the answer was a vocal rebuke.

"Because he didn't do it." She stated the fact as one without a hint of any contradictory possibility.

"Well, he says he did it!" Burke vociferated, still more loudly.

Mary, in her turn, resorted to a bit of finesse, in order to learn whether or not Garson had been arrested. She spoke with a trace of indignation.

"But how could he have done it, when he went——" she began.

The Inspector fell a victim to her superior craft. His question came eagerly.

"Where did he go?"

Mary smiled for the first time since she had been in the room, and in that smile the Inspector realized his defeat in the first passage of this game of intrigue between them.

"You ought to know," she said, sedately, "since you have arrested him, and he has confessed."

Demarest put up a hand to conceal his smile over the police official's chagrin. Gilder, staring always at this woman who had come to be his Nemesis, was marveling over the beauty and *verve* of the one so hating him as to plan the ruin of his life and his son's.

Burke was frantic over being worsted thus. To gain a diversion, he reverted to his familiar bullying tactics. His question burst raspingly. It was a question that had come to be constant within his brain during the last few hours, one that obsessed him, that fretted him sorely, almost beyond endurance.

"Who shot Griggs?" he shouted.

Mary rested serene in the presence of this violence. Her answer capped the climax of the officer's exasperation.

"My husband shot a burglar," she said, languidly.

And then her insolence reached its culmination in a query of her own: "Was his name Griggs?" It was done with splendid art, with a splendid mastery of her own emotions, for, even as she spoke the words, she was remembering those shuddering seconds when she had stood, only a few hours ago, gazing down at the inert bulk that had been a man.

Burke betook himself to another form of attack.

"Oh, you know better than that," he declared, truculently. "You see, we've traced the Maxim silencer. Garson himself bought it up in Hartford."

For the first time, Mary was caught off her guard.

"But he told me——" she began, then became aware of her indiscretion, and checked herself.

Burke seized on her lapse with avidity.

"What did he tell you?" he questioned, eagerly.

Now, Mary had regained her self-command, and she spoke calmly.

"He told me," she said, without a particle of hesitation, "that he had never seen one. Surely, if he had had anything of the sort, he would have shown it to me then."

"Probably he did, too!" Burke rejoined, without the least suspicion that his surly utterance touched the truth exactly. "Now, see here," he went on, trying to make his voice affable, though with small success, for he was excessively irritated by these repeated failures; "I can make it a lot easier for you if you'll talk. Come on, now! Who killed Griggs?"

Mary cast off pretense finally, and spoke malignantly.

"That's for you to find out," she said, sneering.

Burke pressed the button on the desk, and, when the doorman appeared, ordered that the prisoner be returned to her cell.

But Mary stood rebellious, and spoke with a resumption of her cynical scorn.

"I suppose," she said, with a glance of contempt toward Demarest, "that it's useless for me to claim my constitutional rights, and demand to see a lawyer?"

Burke, too, had cast off pretense at last.

"Yes," he agreed, with an evil smirk, "you've guessed it right, the first time."

Mary spoke to the District Attorney.

"I believe," she said, with a new dignity of bearing, "that such is my constitutional right, is it not, Mr. Demarest?"

The lawyer sought no evasion of the issue. For that matter, he was coming to have an increasing respect, even admiration, for this young woman, who endured insult and ignominy with a spirit so sturdy, and met strategem with other strategem better devised. So, now, he made his answer with frank honesty.

"It is your constitutional right, Miss Turner."

Mary turned her clear eyes on the Inspector, and awaited from that official a reply that was not forthcoming. Truth to tell, Burke was far from comfortable under that survey.

"Well, Inspector?" she inquired, at last.

Burke took refuge, as his wont was when too hard pressed, in a mighty bellow.

"The Constitution don't go here!" It was the best he could do, and it shamed him, for he knew its weakness. Again, wrath surged in him, and it surged high. He welcomed the advent of Cassidy, who came hurrying in with a grin of satisfaction on his stolid face.

"Say, Chief," the detective said with animation, in response to Burke's glance of inquiry, "we've got Garson."

Mary's face fell, though the change of expression was almost imperceptible. Only Demarest, a student of much experience, observed the fleeting display of repressed emotion. When the Inspector took thought to look at her, she was as impassive as before. Yet, he was minded to try another ruse in his desire to defeat the intelligence of this woman. To this end, he asked Gilder and the District Attorney to withdraw, while he should have a private conversation with the prisoner. As she listened to his request, Mary smiled again in sphinx-like fashion, and there was still on her lips an expression that caused the official a pang of doubt, when, at last, the two were left alone together, and he darted a surreptitious glance toward her. Nevertheless, he pressed on his device valiantly.

"Now," he said, with a marked softening of manner, "I'm going to be your friend."

"Are you?" Mary's tone was non-committal.

"Yes," Burke declared, heartily. "And I mean it! Give up the truth about young Gilder. I know he shot Griggs, of course. But I'm not taking any stock in that

burglar story—not a little bit! No court would, either. What was really back of the killing?" Burke's eyes narrowed cunningly. "Was he jealous of Griggs? Well, that's what he might do then. He's always been a worthless young cub. A rotten deal like this would be about his gait, I guess. . . . Tell me, now: Why did he shoot Eddie Griggs?"

There was coarseness a-plenty in the Inspector's pretense, but it possessed a solitary fundamental virtue: it played on the heart of the woman whom he questioned, aroused it to wrath in defense of her mate. In a second, all poise fled from this girl whose soul was blossoming in the blest realization that a man loved her purely, unselfishly. Her words came stumblingly in their haste. Her eyes were near to black in their anger.

"He didn't kill him! He didn't kill him!" she fairly hissed. "Why, he's the most wonderful man in the world. You sha'n't hurt him! Nobody shall hurt him! I'll fight to the end of my life for Dick Gilder!"

Burke was beaming joyously. At last—a long last! —his finesse had won the victory over this woman's subtleties.

"Well, that's just what I thought," he said, with smug content. "And now, then, who did shoot Griggs? We've got every one of the gang. They're all crooks. See here," he went on, with a sudden change to the respectful in his manner, "why don't you start fresh? I'll give you every chance in the world. I'm dead on the level with you this time."

But he was too late. By now, Mary had herself well

in hand again, vastly ashamed of the short period of self-betrayal caused by the official's artifice against her heart. As she listened to the Inspector's assurances, the mocking expression of her face was not encouraging to that astute individual, but he persevered manfully.

"Just you wait," he went on cheerfully, "and I'll prove to you that I'm on the level about this, that I'm really your friend. . . . There was a letter came for you to your apartment. My men brought it down to me. I've read it. Here it is. I'll read it to you!"

He picked up an envelope, which had been lying on the desk, and drew out the single sheet of paper it contained. Mary watched him, wondering much more than her expression revealed over this new development. Then, as she listened, quick interest touched her features to a new life. In her eyes leaped emotions to make or mar a life.

This was the letter:

"I can't go without telling you how sorry I am. There won't never be a time that I won't remember it was me got you sent up, that you did time in my place. I ain't going to forgive myself ever, and I swear I'm going straight always.

"Your true friend,
"HELEN MORRIS."

For once, Burke showed a certain delicacy. When he had finished the reading, he said nothing for a long minute—only, sat with his cunning eyes on the face of the

woman who was immobile there before him. And, as he looked on her in her slender elegance of form and gentlewomanly loveliness of face, a loveliness intelligent and refined beyond that of most women, he felt borne in on his consciousness the fact that here was one to be respected. He fought against the impression. It was to him preposterous, for she was one of that underworld against which he was ruthlessly at war. Yet, he could not altogether overcome his instinct toward a half-reverent admiration. . . . And, as the letter proved, she had been innocent at the outset. She had been the victim of a mistaken justice, made outcast by the law she had never wronged. . . . His mood of respect was inevitable, since he had some sensibilities, though they were coarsened, and they sensed vaguely the maelström of emotions that now swirled in the girl's breast.

To Mary Turner, this was the wonderful hour. In it, the vindication of her innocence was made complete. The story was there recorded in black and white on the page written by Helen Morris. It mattered little—or infinitely much!—that it came too late. She had gained her evil place in the world, was a notorious woman in fact, was even now a prisoner under suspicion of murder. Nevertheless, she felt a thrill of ecstasy over this written document—which it had never occurred to her to wrest from the girl at the time of the oral confession. Now that it had been proffered, the value of it loomed above almost all things else in the world. It proclaimed undeniably the wrong under which she had suffered. She was not the thief the court had adjudged

her. She had a right to the respect of the world that had condemned her unjustly. Through her mind unfolded the panorama of the years—years black and crimson, years of irreparable miseries. But, by so much, the more majestic the triumph out of this final event! What had before been so long a mystery, known to herself only within this little while, now was become a matter of record, for all to read. Her acquired instinct of thinking within the law set the thing before her as something tremendous in its significance. This was a paper, visible evidence. This letter from the conscience-stricken girl, Helen Morris, was sufficient to prove innocence within the law. . . . Mary's eyes were luminous in the joy of the realization that for her, after all, rehabilitation might be in a measure possible, though nothing could ever repay the degradation of years infinitely worse than lost.

Burke's harsh voice, cadenced to a singular sympathy, broke in on her reverie of pleasure and of pain.

"You knew this?" he inquired.

"Yes," Mary said, frankly. "Two days ago."

Burke forgot his professional animosities in a curiosity that was a credit to his manhood.

"Did you tell old Gilder?" he asked.

Mary shook her head in negation.

"What would be the use?" she reminded him. "I had no proof. No one would believe me."

Of a sudden, the Inspector realized with a start of self-reproach, that he was neglecting an opportunity.

Thereat, he hastened to make up for his momentary lapse.

"They'd believe this," he said, briskly. "Why, this letter sets you clear. If old Gilder should see this letter, there's nothing he wouldn't do to make amends to you. He's a square guy himself, if it comes to that, even if he was hard on you. Why, this letter wipes out everything."

Then, the insistent question beating at his brain forced him to speak roughly, building hope on the letter's inestimable worth to the woman before him.

"Who killed Griggs?"

There was no reply. And, presently, he went on, half-ashamed over his own intrigue against her.

"Say," he said, and, for once, his voice was curiously suppressed, "you tell me who shot Griggs, and I'll show this letter to old Gilder." Again, the police official was in the ascendant. He forgot his sympathy of a moment ago in his zeal as a tracer of crime. He pledged himself ruthlessly to a lie.

"Now, listen," he cried, eagerly, "I give you my word of honor that anything you say in here is just between you and me." Unconsciously, his eyes darted to the window, behind which the stenographer was busy with his notes.

That single involuntary glance was enough for the keen instinct of the woman to make a guess as to the verity.

"Just tip me off to the truth," Burke went on ingratiatingly, "and I'll get the necessary evidence in my own

way. Now, there's nobody here but just you and me. Come on, now—put me wise!"

Mary was again the resourceful woman who was glad to pit her brain against the contriving of those who fought her. So, at this moment, she seemed pliant to the will of the man who urged her thus cunningly. Her quick glance around the office was of a sort to delude the Inspector into a belief that she was yielding to his lure.

"Are you sure no one will ever know?" she asked, timorously.

"Nobody but you and me," Burke declared, all agog with anticipation of victory at last. "I give you my word!"

Mary met the gaze of the Inspector fully. In the same instant, she flashed on him a smile that was dazzling, the smile of a woman triumphant in her mastery of the situation. Her face was radiant, luminous with honest mirth. There was something simple and genuine in her beauty that thrilled the man before her, the man trying so vindictively to trap her to her own undoing. For all his grossness, Burke was of shrewd perceptions, and somewhere, half-submerged under the sordid nature of his calling, was a love of things esthetic, a responsiveness to the appeals of beauty. Now, as his glance searched the face of the girl who was bubbling with mirth, he experienced an odd warming of his heart under the spell of her loveliness—a loveliness wholly feminine, pervasive, wholesome. But, too, his soul shook in a premonition of catastrophe, for there was

mischief in the beaming eyes of softest violet. There was a demon of mockery playing in the curves of the scarlet lips, as she smiled so winsomely.

All his apprehensions were verified by her utterance. It came in a most casual voice, despite the dancing delight in her face. The tones were drawled in the matter-of-fact fashion of statement that leads a listener to answer without heed to the exact import of the question, unless very alert, indeed. . . . This is what she said in that so-casual voice:

"I'm not speaking loud enough, am I, stenographer?"

And that industrious writer of shorthand notes, absorbed in his task, answered instantly from his hidden place in the corridor.

"No, ma'am, not quite."

Mary laughed aloud, while Burke sat dumfounded. She rose swiftly, and went to the nearest window, and with a pull at the cord sent the shade flying upward. For seconds, there was revealed the busy stenographer, bent over his pad. Then, the noise of the ascending shade, which had been hammering on his consciousness, penetrated, and he looked up. Realization came, as he beheld the woman laughing at him through the window. Consternation beset him. He knew that, somehow, he had bungled fatally. A groan of distress burst from him, and he fled the place in ignominious rout.

There was another whose spirit was equally desirous of flight—Burke! Yet once again, he was beaten at his own game, his cunning made of no avail against the clever interpretation of this woman whom he assailed.

He had no defense to offer. He did not care to meet her gaze just then, since he was learning to respect her as one wronged, where he had regarded her hitherto merely as of the flotsam and jetsam of the criminal class. So, he avoided her eyes as she stood by the window regarding him quizzically. In a panic of confusion quite new to him in his years of experience, he pressed the button on his desk.

The doorman appeared with that automatic precision which made him valuable in his position, and the Inspector hailed the ready presence with a feeling of profound relief.

"Dan, take her back!" he said, feebly.

Mary was smiling still as she went to the door. But she could not resist the impulse toward retort.

"Oh, yes," she said, suavely; "you were right on the level with me, weren't you, Burke? Nobody here but you and me!" The words came in a sing-song of mockery.

The Inspector had nothing in the way of answer—only, sat motionless until the door closed after her. Then, left alone, his sole audible comment was a single word—one he had learned, perhaps, from Aggie Lynch:

"Hell!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CONFESSION.

Burke was a persistent man, and he had set himself to getting the murderer of Griggs. Foiled in his efforts thus far by the opposition of Mary, he now gave himself over to careful thought as to a means of procedure that might offer the best possibilities of success. His beetling brows were drawn in a frown of perplexity for a full quarter of an hour, while he rested motionless in his chair, an unlighted cigar between his lips. Then, at last, his face cleared; a grin of satisfaction twisted his heavy mouth, and he smote the desk joyously.

"It's a cinch it'll get 'im!" he rumbled, in glee.

He pressed the button-call, and ordered the doorman to send in Cassidy. When the detective appeared a minute later, he went directly to his subject with a straightforward energy usual to him in his work.

"Does Garson know we've arrested the Turner girl and young Gilder?" And, when he had been answered in the negative: "Or that we've got Chicago Red and Dacey here?"

"No," Cassidy replied. "He hasn't been spoken to since we made the collar. . . . He seems worried," the detective volunteered.

Burke's broad jowls shook from the force with which he snapped his jaws together.

"He'll be more worried before I get through with him!" he growled. He regarded Cassidy speculatively. "Do you remember the Third Degree Inspector Burns worked on McGloin? Well," he went on, as the detective nodded assent, "that's what I'm going to do to Garson. He's got imagination, that crook! The things he don't know about are the things he's afraid of. After he gets in here, I want you to take his pals one after the other, and lock them up in the cells there in the corridor. The shades on the corridor windows here will be up, and Garson will see them taken in. The fact of their being there will set his imagination to working overtime, all right."

Burke reflected for a moment, and then issued the final directions for the execution of his latest plot.

"When you get the buzzer from me, you have young Gilder and the Turner woman sent in. Then, after a while, you'll get another buzzer. When you hear that, come right in here, and tell me that the gang has squealed. I'll do the rest. Bring Garson here in just five minutes. . . . Tell Dan to come in."

As the detective went out, the doorman promptly entered, and thereat Burke proceeded with the further instructions necessary to the carrying out of his scheme.

"Take the chairs out of the office, Dan," he directed, "except mine and one other—that one!" He indicated a chair standing a little way from one end of his desk. "Now, have all the shades up." He chuckled as he

added: "That Turner woman saved you the trouble with one."

As the doorman went out after having fulfilled these commands, the Inspector lighted the cigar which he had retained still in his mouth, and then seated himself in the chair that was set partly facing the windows opening on the corridor. He smiled with anticipatory triumph as he made sure that the whole length of the corridor with the barred doors of the cells was plainly visible to one sitting thus. With a final glance about to make certain that all was in readiness, he returned to his chair, and, when the door opened, he was, to all appearances, busily engaged in writing.

"Here's Garson, Chief," Cassidy announced.

"Hello, Joe!" Burke exclaimed, with a seeming of careless friendliness, as the detective went out, and Garson stood motionless just within the door.

"Sit down, a minute, won't you?" the Inspector continued, affably. He did not look up from his writing as he spoke.

Garson's usually strong face was showing weak with fear. His chin, which was commonly very firm, moved a little from uneasy twitchings of his lips. His clear eyes were slightly clouded to a look of apprehension, as they roved the room furtively. He made no answer to the Inspector's greeting for a few moments, but remained standing without movement, poised alertly as if sensing some concealed peril. Finally, however, his anxiety found expression in words. His tone was preg-

nant with alarm, though he strove to make it merely complaining.

"Say, what am I arrested for?" he protested. "I ain't done anything."

Even now, Burke did not look up, and his pen continued to hurry over the paper.

"Who told you you were arrested?" he remarked, cheerfully, in his blandest voice.

Garson uttered an ejaculation of disgust.

"I don't have to be told," he retorted, huffily. "I'm no college president, but, when a cop grabs me and brings me down here, I've got sense enough to know I'm pinched."

The Inspector did not interrupt his work, but answered with the utmost good nature.

"Is that what they did to you, Joe? I'll have to speak to Cassidy about that. Now, just you sit down, Joe, won't you? I want to have a little talk with you. I'll be through here in a second." He went on with the writing.

Garson moved forward slightly, to the single chair near the end of the desk, and there seated himself mechanically. His face thus was turned toward the windows that gave on the corridor, and his eyes grew yet more clouded as they rested on the grim doors of the cells. He writhed in his chair, and his gaze jumped from the cells to the impassive figure of the man at the desk. Now, the forger's nervousness increased momently—it swept beyond his control. Of a sudden, he sprang up, and stepped close to the Inspector.

"Say," he said, in a husky voice, "I'd like—I'd like to have a lawyer."

"What's the matter with you, Joe?" the Inspector returned, always with that imperturbable air, and without raising his head from the work that so engrossed his attention. "You know, you're not arrested, Joe. Maybe, you never will be. Now, for the love of Mike, keep still, and let me finish this letter."

Slowly, very hesitatingly, Garson went back to the chair, and sank down on it in a limp attitude of dejection wholly unlike his customary postures of strength. Again, his fear-fascinated eyes went to the row of cells that stood silently menacing on the other side of the corridor beyond the windows. His face was tinged with gray. A physical sickness was creeping stealthily on him, as his thoughts held insistently to the catastrophe that threatened. His intelligence was too keen to permit a belief that Burke's manner of almost fulsome kindliness hid nothing ominous—ominous with a hint of death for him in return for the death he had wrought.

Then, terror crystallized. His eyes were caught by a figure, the figure of Cassidy, advancing there in the

There was something concretely sinister to Garson in this fact of Dacey's presence there in the cell.

Of a sudden, the forger cried out raucously:

"Say, Inspector, if you've got anything on me, I—I would——" The cry dropped into unintelligible mumblings.

Burke retained his manner of serene indifference to the other's agitation. Still, his pen hurried over the paper; and he did not trouble to look up as he expostulated, half-banteringly.

"Now, now! What's the matter with you, Joe? I told you that I wanted to ask you a few questions. That's all."

Garson leaped to his feet again resolutely, then faltered, and ultimately fell back into the chair with a groan, as the Inspector went on speaking.

"Now, Joe, sit down, and keep still, I tell you, and let me get through with this job. It won't take me more than a minute more.

But, after a moment, Garson's emotion forced him to another appeal.

"Say, Inspector——" he began.

Then, abruptly, he was silent, his mouth still open to utter the words that were now held back by horror. Again, he saw the detective walking forward, out there in the corridor. And with him, as before, was a second figure, which advanced slinkingly. Garson leaned forward in his chair, his head thrust out, watching in rigid suspense. Again, even as before, the door swung wide,

the prisoner slipped within, the door clanged shut, the bolts clattered noisily into their sockets.

And, in the watcher, terror grew—for he had seen the face of Chicago Red, another of his pals, another who had seen him kill Griggs. For a time that seemed to him long ages of misery, Garson sat staring dazedly at the closed doors of the tier of cells. The peril about him was growing—growing, and it was a deadly peril! At last, he licked his dry lips, and his voice broke in a throaty whisper.

"Say, Inspector, if you've got anything against me, why——"

"Who said there was anything against you, Joe?" Burke rejoined, in a voice that was genially chiding. "What's the matter with you to-day, Joe? You seem nervous." Still, the official kept on with his writing.

"No, I ain't nervous," Garson cried, with a feverish effort to appear calm. "Why, what makes you think that? But this ain't exactly the place you'd pick out as a pleasant one to spend the morning." He was silent for a little, trying with all his strength to regain his self-control, but with small success.

"Could I ask you a question?" he demanded finally, with more firmness in his voice.

"What is it?" Burke said.

Garson cleared his throat with difficulty, and his voice was thick.

"I was just going to say—" he began. Then, he hesitated, and was silent, at a loss.

"Well, what is it, Joe?" the Inspector prompted.

"I was going to say—that is—well, if it's anything about Mary Turner, I don't know a thing—not a thing!"

It was the thought of possible peril to her that now, in an instant, had caused him to forget his own mortal danger. Where, before, he had been shuddering over thoughts of the death-house cell that might be awaiting him, he now had concern only for the safety of the woman he cherished. And there was a great grief in his soul; for it was borne in on him that his own folly, in disobedience to her command, had led up to the murder of Griggs—and to all that might come of the crime. How could he ever make amends to her? At least, he could be brave here, for her sake, if not for his own.

Burke believed that his opportunity was come.

"What made you think I wanted to know anything about her?" he questioned.

"Oh, I can't exactly say," Garson replied carelessly, in an attempt to dissimulate his agitation. "You were up to the house, you know. Don't you see?"

"I did want to see her, that's a fact," Burke admitted. He kept on with his writing, his head bent low. "But she wasn't at her flat. I guess she must have taken my advice, and skipped out. Clever girl, that!"

Garson contrived to present an aspect of comparative indifference.

"Yes," he agreed. "I was thinking of going West, myself," he ventured.

"Oh, were you?" Burke exclaimed; and, now, there was a new note in his voice. His hand slipped into the

pocket where was the pistol, and clutched it. He stared at Garson fiercely, and spoke with a rush of the words:

"Why did you kill Eddie Griggs?"

"I didn't kill him!" The reply was quick enough, but it came weakly. Again, Garson was forced to wet his lips with a dry tongue, and to swallow painfully. "I tell you, I didn't kill him!" he repeated at last, with more force.

Burke sneered his disbelief.

"You killed him last night—with this!" he cried, viciously. On the instant, the pistol leaped into view, pointed straight at Garson. "Why?" the Inspector shouted. "Come on, now! Why?"

"I didn't, I tell you!" Garson was growing stronger, since at last the crisis was upon him. He got to his feet with lithe swiftness of movement, and sprang close to the desk. He bent his head forward challengingly, to meet the glare of his accuser's eyes. There was no flinching in his own steely stare. His nerves had ceased their jangling under the tautening of necessity.

"You did!" Burke vociferated. He put his whole will into the assertion of guilt, to batter down the man's resistance. "You did, I tell you! You did!"

Garson leaned still further forward, until his face was almost level with the Inspector's. His eyes were unclouded now, were blazing. His voice came resonant in its denial. The entire pose of him was intrepid, dauntless.

"And I tell you, I didn't!"

There passed many seconds, while the two men bat-

tled in silence, will warring against will. . . . In the end, it was the murderer who triumphed.

Suddenly, Burke dropped the pistol into his pocket, and lolled back in his chair. His gaze fell away from the man confronting him. In the same instant, the rigidity of Garson's form relaxed, and he straightened slowly. A tide of secret joy swept through him, as he realized his victory. But his outward expression remained unchanged.

"Oh, well," Burke exclaimed amiably, "I didn't really think you did, but I wasn't sure, so I had to take a chance. You understand, don't you, Joe?"

"Sure, I understand," Garson replied, with an amiability equal to the Inspector's own.

Burke's manner continued very amicable as he went on speaking.

"You see, Joe, anyhow, we've got the right party safe enough. You can bet on that!"

Garson resisted the lure.

"If you don't want me——" he began suggestively; and he turned toward the door to the outer hall. "Why, if you don't want me, I'll—get along."

"Oh, what's the hurry, Joe?" Burke retorted, with the effect of stopping the other short. He pressed the buzzer as the agreed signal to Cassidy. "Where did you say Mary Turner was last night?"

At the question, all Garson's fears for the woman rushed back on him with appalling force. Of what avail his safety, if she were still in peril?

"I don't know where she was," he exclaimed, doubt-

fully. He realized his blunder even as the words left his lips, and sought to correct it as best he might. "Why, yes, I do, too," he went on, as if assailed by sudden memory. "I dropped into her place kind of late, and they said she'd gone to bed—headache, I guess. . . . Yes, she was home, of course. She didn't go out of the house, all night." His insistence on the point was of itself suspicious, but eagerness to protect her stultified his wits.

Burke sat grim and silent, offering no comment on the lie.

"Know anything about young Gilder?" he demanded. "Happen to know where he is now?" He arose and came around the desk, so that he stood close to Garson, at whom he glowered.

"Not a thing!" was the earnest answer. But the speaker's fear rose swiftly, for the linking of these names was significant—frightfully significant!

The inner door opened, and Mary Turner entered the office. Garson with difficulty suppressed the cry of distress that rose to his lips. For a few moments, the silence was unbroken. Then, presently, Burke, by a gesture, directed the girl to advance toward the center of the room. As she obeyed, he himself went a little toward the door, and, when it opened again, and Dick Gilder appeared, he interposed to check the young man's rush forward as his gaze fell on his bride, who stood regarding him with sad eyes.

Garson stared mutely at the burly man in uniform who held their destinies in the hollow of a hand. His

lips parted as if he were about to speak. Then, he bade defiance to the impulse. He deemed it safer for all that he should say nothing—now! . . . And it is very easy to say a word too many. And that one may be a word never to be unsaid—or gainsaid.

Then, while still that curious, dynamic silence endured, Cassidy came briskly into the office. By some magic of duty, he had contrived to give his usually hebetudinous features an expression of enthusiasm.

"Say, Chief," the detective said rapidly, "they've squealed!"

Burke regarded his aide with an air intolerably triumphant. His voice came smug:

"Squealed, eh?" His glance ran over Garson for a second, then made its inquisition of Mary and of Dick Gilder. He did not give a look to Cassidy as he put his question. "Do they tell the same story?" And then, when the detective had answered in the affirmative, he went on speaking in tones ponderous with self-complacency; and, now, his eyes held sharply, craftily, on the woman.

"I was right then, after all—right, all the time! Good enough!" Of a sudden, his voice boomed somberly. "Mary Turner, I want you for the murder of——"

Garson's rush halted the sentence. He had leaped forward. His face was rigid. He broke on the Inspector's words with a gesture of fury. His voice came in a hiss:

"That's a damned lie! . . . . I did it!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

ANGUISH AND BLISS.

Joe Garson had shouted his confession without a second of reflection. But the result must have been the same had he taken years of thought. Between him and her as the victim of the law, there could be no hesitation for choice. Indeed, just now, he had no heed to his own fate. The prime necessity was to save her, Mary, from the toils of the law that were closing around her. For himself, in the days to come, there would be a ghastly dread, but there would never be regret over the cost of saving her. Perhaps, some other he might have let suffer in his stead—not her! Even, had he been innocent, and she guilty of the crime, he would still have taken the burden of it on his own shoulders. He had saved her from the waters—he would save her until the end, as far as the power in him might lie. It was thus that, with the primitive directness of his reverential love for the girl, he counted no sacrifice too great in her behalf. Joe Garson was not a good man, at the world esteems goodness. On the contrary, he was distinctly an evil one, a menace to the society on which he preyed constantly. But his good qualities, if few, were of the strongest fiber, rooted in the deeps of him. He loathed treachery. His one guiltiness in this respect

had been, curiously enough, toward Mary herself, in the scheme of the burglary, which she had forbidden. But, in the last analysis, here his deceit had been designed to bring affluence to her. It was his abhorrence of treachery among pals that had driven him to the murder of the stool-pigeon in a fit of ungovernable passion. He might have stayed his hand then, but for the gusty rage that swept him on to the crime. None the less, had he spared the man, his hatred of the betrayer would have been the same. . . . And the other virtue of Joe Garson was the complement of this—his own loyalty, a loyalty that made him forget self utterly where he loved. The one woman who had ever filled his heart was Mary, and for her his life were not too much to give.

The suddenness of it all held Mary voiceless for long seconds. She was frozen with horror of the event. When, at last, words came, they were a frantic prayer of protest.

"No, Joe! No! Don't talk—don't talk!"

Burke, immensely gratified, went nimbly to his chair, and thence surveyed the agitated group with grisly pleasure.

"Joe has talked," he said, significantly.

Mary, shaken as she was by the fact of Garson's confession, nevertheless retained her presence of mind sufficiently to resist with all her strength.

"He did it to protect me," she stated, earnestly.

The Inspector disdained such futile argument. As

the doorman appeared in answer to the buzzer, he directed that the stenographer be summoned at once.

"We'll have the confession in due form," he remarked, gazing pleasedly on the three before him.

"He's not going to confess," Mary insisted, with spirit.

But Burke was not in the least impressed. He disregarded her completely, and spoke mechanically to Garson the formal warning required by the law.

"You are hereby cautioned that anything you say may be used against you." Then, as the stenographer entered, he went on with lively interest. "Now, Joe!"

Yet once again, Mary protested, a little wildly.

"Don't speak, Joe! Don't say a word till we can get a lawyer for you!"

The man met her pleading eyes steadily, and shook his head in refusal.

"It's no use, my girl," Burke broke in, harshly. "I told you I'd get you. I'm going to try you and Garson, and the whole gang for murder—yes, every one of you. . . . And you, Gilder," he continued, lowering on the young man who had defied him so obstinately, "you'll go to the House of Detention as a material witness." He turned his gaze to Garson again, and spoke authoritatively: "Come on now, Joe!"

Garson went a step toward the desk, and spoke decisively.

"If I come through, you'll let her go—and him?" he added as an afterthought, with a nod toward Dick Gilder.

"Oh, Joe, don't!" Mary cried, bitterly. "We'll spend every dollar we can raise to save you!"

"Now, it's no use," the Inspector complained. "You're only wasting time. He's said that he did it. That's all there is to it. Now that we're sure he's our man, he hasn't got a chance in the world."

"Well, how about it?" Garson demanded, savagely. "Do they go clear, if I come through?"

"We'll get the best lawyers in the country," Mary persisted, desperately. "We'll save you, Joe—we'll save you!"

Garson regarded the distraught girl with wistful eyes. But there was no trace of yielding in his voice as he replied, though he spoke very sorrowfully.

"No, you can't help me," he said, simply. "My time has come, Mary. . . . And I can save you a lot of trouble."

"He's right there," Burke ejaculated. "We've got him cold. So, what's the use of dragging you two into it?"

"Then, they go clear?" Garson exclaimed, eagerly. "They ain't even to be called as witnesses?"

Burke nodded assent.

"You're on!" he agreed.

"Then, here goes!" Garson cried; and he looked expectantly toward the stenographer.

The strain of it all was sapping the will of the girl, who saw the man she so greatly esteemed for his service to her and his devotion about to condemn himself to

death. She grew half-hysterical. Her words came confusedly:

"No, Joe! No, no, no!"

Again, Garson shook his head in absolute refusal of her plea.

"There's no other way out," he declared, wearily. "I'm going through with it." He straightened a little, and again looked at the stenographer. His voice came quietly, without any tremulousnesss.

"My name is Joe Garson."

"Alias?" Burke suggested.

"Alias nothing!" came the sharp retort. "Garson's my monaker. I shot English Eddie, because he was a skunk, and a stool-pigeon, and he got just what was coming to him." Vituperation beyond the mere words beat in his voice now.

Burke twisted uneasily in his chair.

"Now, now!" he objected, severely. "We can't take a confession like that."

Garson shook his head—spoke with fiercer hatred.

"——because he was a skunk, and a stool-pigeon," he repeated. "Have you got it?" And then, as the stenographer nodded assent, he went on, less violently: "I croaked him just as he was going to call the bulls with a police-whistle. I used a gun with smokeless powder. It had a Maxim silencer on it, so that it didn't make any noise."

Garson paused, and the set despair of his features lightened a little. Into his voice came a tone of exultation indescribably ghastly. It was born of the eternal

egotism of the criminal, fattening vanity in gloating over his ingenuity for evil. Garson, despite his two great virtues, had the vices of his class. Now, he stared at Burke with a quizzical grin crooking his lips.

"Say," he exclaimed, "I'll bet it's the first time a guy was ever croaked with one of them things! Ain't it?"

The Inspector nodded affirmation. There was sincere admiration in his expression, for he was ready at all times to respect the personal abilities of the criminals against whom he waged relentless war.

"That's right, Joe!" he said, with perceptible enthusiasm.

"Some class to that, eh?" Garson demanded, still with that gruesome air of boasting. "I got the gun, and the Maxim-silencer thing, off a fence in Boston," he explained. "Say, that thing cost me sixty dollars, and it's worth every cent of the money. . . . Why, they'll remember me as the first to spring one of them things, won't they?"

"They sure will, Joe!" the Inspector conceded.

"Nobody knew I had it," Garson continued, dropping his braggart manner abruptly.

At the words, Mary started, and her lips moved as if she were about to speak.

Garson, intent on her always, though he seemed to look only at Burke, observed the effect on her, and repeated his words swiftly, with a warning emphasis that gave the girl pause.

"Nobody knew I had it—nobody in the world!" he

declared. "And nobody had anything to do with the killing but me."

Burke put a question that was troubling him much, concerning the motive that lay behind the shooting of Griggs.

"Was there any bad feeling between you and Eddie Griggs?"

Garson's reply was explicit.

"Never till that very minute. Then, I learned the truth about what he'd framed up with you." The speaker's voice reverted to its former fierceness in recollection of the treachery of one whom he had trusted.

"He was a stool-pigeon, and I hated his guts! That's all," he concluded, with brutal candor.

The Inspector moved restlessly in his chair. He had only detestation for the slain man, yet there was something morbidly distasteful in the thought that he himself had contrived the situation which had resulted in the murder of his confederate. It was only by an effort that he shook off the vague feeling of guilt.

"Nothing else to say?" he inquired.

Garson reflected for a few seconds, then made a gesture of negation.

"Nothing else," he declared. "I croaked him, and I'm glad I done it. He was a skunk. That's all, and it's enough. And it's all true, so help me God!"

The Inspector nodded dismissal to the stenographer, with an air of relief.

"That's all, Williams," he said, heavily. "He'll sign it as soon as you've transcribed the notes."

Then, as the stenographer left the room, Burke turned his gaze on the woman, who stood there in a posture of complete dejection, her white, anguished face downcast. There was triumph in the Inspector's voice as he addressed her, for his professional pride was full-fed by this victory over his foes. But there was, too, an undertone of a feeling softer than pride, more generous, something akin to real commiseration for this unhappy girl who drooped before him, suffering so poignantly in the knowledge of the fate that awaited the man who had saved her, who had loved her so unselfishly.

"Young woman," Burke said briskly, "it's just like I told you. You can't beat the law. Garson thought he could—and now——!" He broke off, with a wave of his hand toward the man who had just sentenced himself to death in the electric-chair.

"That's right," Garson agreed, with somber intensity. His eyes were grown clouded again now, and his voice dragged leaden. "That's right, Mary," he repeated dully, after a little pause. "You can't beat the law!"

There followed a period of silence, in which great emotions were vibrant from heart to heart. Garson was thinking of Mary, and, with the thought, into his misery crept a little comfort. At least, she would go free. That had been in the bargain with Burke. And there was the boy, too. His eyes shot a single swift glance toward Dick Gilder, and his satisfaction increased as he noted the alert poise of the young man's body, the strained expression of the strong face, the gaze of absorbed

yearning with which he regarded Mary. There could be no doubt concerning the depth of the lad's love for the girl. Moreover, there were manly qualities in him to work out all things needful for her protection through life. Already, he had proved his devotion, and that abundantly, his unswerving fidelity to her, and the force within him that made these worthy in some measure of her.

Garson felt no least pang of jealousy. Though he loved the woman with the single love of his life, he had never, somehow, hoped aught for himself. There was even something almost of the paternal in the purity of his love, as if, indeed, by the fact of restoring her to life he had taken on himself the responsibility of a parent. He knew that the boy worshiped her, would do his best for her, that this best would suffice for her happiness in time. Garson, with the instinct of love, guessed that Mary had in truth given her heart all unaware to the husband whom she had first lured only for the lust of revenge. Garson nodded his head in a melancholy satisfaction. His life was done: hers was just beginning, now. . . . But she would remember him —oh, yes, always! Mary was loyal.

The man checked the trend of his thoughts by a mighty effort of will. He must not grow maudlin here. He spoke again to Mary, with a certain dignity.

"No, you can't beat the law!" He hesitated a little, then went on, with a certain curious embarrassment. "And this same old law says a woman must stick to her man."

The girl's eyes met his with passionate sorrow in their misty deeps. Garson gave a significant glance toward Dick Gilder, then his gaze returned to her. There was a smoldering despair in that look. There were, as well, an entreaty and a command.

"So," he went on, "you must go along with him, Mary. . . . Won't you? It's the best thing to do."

The girl could not answer. There was a clutch on her throat just then, which would not relax at the call of her will.

The tension of a moment grew, became pervasive. Burke, accustomed as he was to scenes of dramatic violence, now experienced an altogether unfamiliar thrill. As for Garson, once again the surge of feeling threatened to overwhelm his self-control. He must not break down! For Mary's sake, he must show himself stoical, quite undisturbed in this supreme hour.

Of a sudden, an inspiration came to him, a means to snap the tension, to create a diversion wholly efficacious. He would turn to his boasting again, would call upon his vanity, which he knew well as his chief foible, and make it serve as the foil against his love. He strove manfully to throw off the softer mood. In a measure, at least, he won the fight—though always, under the rush of this vaunting, there throbbed the anguish of his heart.

"You want to cut out worrying about me," he counseled, bravely. "Why, I ain't worrying any, myself—not a little bit! You see, it's something new I've pulled off. Nobody ever put over anything like it before."

"THAT'S ALL RIGHT", HE MURMURED, HUSKILY. "THAT'S ALL RIGHT, MARY. YOU KNOW HE'LL LOOK AFTER YOU . . . YES, HE'LL LOOK AFTER YOU."

He faced Burke with a grin of gloating again.

"I'll bet there'll be a lot of stuff in the newspapers about this, and my picture, too, in most of 'em! What?"

The man's manner imposed on Burke, though Mary felt the torment that his vainglorying was meant to mask.

"Say," Garson continued to the Inspector, "if the reporters want any pictures of me, could I have some new ones taken? The one you've got of me in the Gallery is over ten years old. I've taken off my beard since then. Can I have a new one?" He put the question with an eagerness that seemed all sincere.

Burke answered with a fine feeling of generosity.

"Sure, you can, Joe! I'll send you up to the Gallery right now."

"Immense!" Garson cried, boisterously. He moved toward Dick Gilder, walking with a faint suggestion of swagger to cover the nervous tremor that had seized him.

"So long, young fellow!" he exclaimed, and held out his hand. "You've been on the square, and I guess you always will be."

Dick had no scruple in clasping that extended hand very warmly in his own. He had no feeling of repulsion against this man who had committed a murder in his presence. Though he did not quite understand the other's heart, his instinct as a lover taught him much, so that he pitied profoundly—and respected, too.

"We'll do what we can for you," he said, simply.

"That's all right," Garson replied, with such careless-

ness of manner as he could contrive. Then, at last, he turned to Mary. This parting must be bitter, and he braced himself with all the vigors of his will to combat the weakness that leaped from his soul.

As he came near, the girl could hold herself in leash no longer. She threw herself on his breast. Her arms wreathed about his neck. Great sobs racked her.

"Oh, Joe, Joe!" The gasping cry was of utter despair.

Garson's trembling hand patted the girl's shoulder very softly, a caress of infinite tenderness.

"That's all right!" he murmured, huskily. "That's all right, Mary!" There was a short silence; and then he went on speaking, more firmly. "You know, he'll look after you."

He would have said more, but he could not. It seemed to him that the sobs of the girl caught in his own throat. Yet, presently, he strove once again, with every reserve of his strength; and, finally, he so far mastered himself that he could speak calmly. The words were uttered with a subtle renunciation that was this man's religion.

"Yes, he'll take care of you. Why, I'd like to see the two of you with about three kiddies playing round the house."

He looked up over the girl's shoulder, and beckoned with his head to Dick, who came forward at the summons.

"Take good care of her, won't you?"

He disengaged himself gently from the girl's embrace, and set her within the arms of her husband, where

she rested quietly, as if unable to fight longer against fate's decree.

"Well, so long!"

He dared not utter another word, but turned blindly, and went, stumbling a little, toward the doorman, who had appeared in answer to the Inspector's call.

"To the Gallery," Burke ordered, curtly.

Garson went on without ever a glance back. . . . His strength was at an end.

* * * * *

There was a long silence in the room after Garson's passing. It was broken, at last, by the Inspector, who got up from his chair, and advanced toward the husband and wife. In his hand, he carried a sheet of paper, roughly scrawled. As he stopped before the two, and cleared his throat, Mary withdrew herself from Dick's arms, and regarded the official with brooding eyes from out her white face. Something strange in her enemy's expression caught her attention, something that set new hopes alive within her in a fashion wholly inexplicable, so that she waited with a sudden, breathless eagerness.

Burke extended the sheet of paper to the husband.

"There's a document," he said gruffly. "It's a letter from one Helen Morris, in which she sets forth the interesting fact that she pulled off a theft in the Emporium, for which your Mrs. Gilder here did time. You know, your father got your Mrs. Gilder sent up for three years for that same job—which she didn't do! That's why she had such a grudge against your father, and against the law, too!"

Burke chuckled, as the young man took the paper, wonderingly.

"I don't know that I blame her much for that grudge, when all's said and done. . . . You give that document to your father. It sets her right. He's a just man according to his lights, your father. He'll do all he can to make things right for her, now he knows."

Once again, the Inspector paused to chuckle.

"I guess she'll keep within the law from now on," he continued, contentedly, "without getting a lawyer to tell her how. . . . Now, you two listen. I've got to go out a minute. When I get back, I don't want to find anybody here—not anybody! Do you get me?"

He strode from the room, fearful lest further delay might involve him in sentimental thangsgivings from one or the other, or both—and Burke hated sentiment as something distinctly unprofessional.

* * * * *

When the official was gone, the two stood staring mutely each at the other through long seconds. What she read in the man's eyes set the woman's heart to beating with a new delight. A bloom of exquisite rose grew in the pallor of her cheeks. The misty light in the violet eyes shone more radiant, yet more softly. The crimson lips curved to strange tenderness. . . . What he read in her eyes set the husband's pulses to bounding. He opened his arms in an appeal that was a command. Mary went forward slowly, without hesitation, in a bliss that forgot every sorrow for that blessed moment, and cast herself on his breast.

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